

Strategic Communication by Principals and its Impact on Teachers' Job Performance in Post-basic Schools in North-East Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The effective communication is a cornerstone of educational leadership, influencing teacher motivation, performance, and student outcomes. In North-East Nigeria, where post-basic schools face challenges such as insecurity, inadequate infrastructure, and limited supervision, the communication competence of principals is a key determinant of instructional effectiveness. This study employed a correlational survey design to investigate the influence of principals' communication skills on teachers' job performance in post-basic schools across Adamawa, Gombe, Bauchi, and Taraba States. The population comprised 19,797 teachers and principals, from which 592 respondents (516 teachers and 76 principals) were selected using stratified and simple random sampling. Two validated instruments—the Principals' Communication Skills Questionnaire (PCSQ) and Teachers' Job Performance Scale (TJPS)—were used for data collection. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, Pearson correlation, regression, and ANOVA at the 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that principals' communication skills were generally high ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.59$) and significantly predicted teachers' job performance ($\beta = 0.84$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.71$). ANOVA results confirmed a statistically significant difference in teachers' job performance based on principals' communication skill levels ($F(1, 590) = 243.2$, $p < 0.001$), with a large effect size ($\omega^2 \approx 0.70$). Assumptions of normality and homoscedasticity were met, validating the regression model. The study concludes that effective, respectful, and consistent communication by principals significantly enhances teachers' job performance. It recommends institutionalizing feedback mechanisms, conducting periodic communication audits, and strengthening principals' professional development in communication and interpersonal skills to improve instructional quality and educational outcomes in the region.

Keywords: Educational leadership; communication skills; strategic management; teacher performance; school administration; North-East Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Effective communication remains one of the most critical determinants of successful school leadership. In educational management, communication goes beyond the mere transmission of information it is a strategic tool for goal alignment, motivation, and performance enhancement (Adebayo & Mohammed, 2022; Imhangbe, Okecha, & Obozuwa, 2019). Principals who communicate clearly and consistently are more capable of influencing teacher attitudes, coordinating activities, and fostering a school culture that supports teaching and learning (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Through deliberate and skillful communication, principals can inspire cooperation, manage conflicts, and guide teachers toward achieving institutional goals (Okeke, 2023; Guskey, 2020). In recent years, researchers have increasingly emphasized communication as a strategic management function in educational leadership. Effective communication ensures that teachers understand school visions, policies, and expectations, thereby improving instructional delivery and student achievement (Hallinger, 2011; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Conversely, poor communication breeds misunderstanding, weak morale, and resistance to change (Ikeme & Asouzu, 2023; Wachira, 2019). In many educational systems, including Nigeria's, leadership failures are often traceable to deficiencies in communication competence rather than lack of technical skill (Lawal & Umar, 2021; Owan & Agunwa, 2019).

The North-East region of Nigeria presents a particularly complex educational environment. Schools in states such as Adamawa, Gombe, Bauchi, and Taraba operate amid challenges including inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, high student-teacher ratios, insecurity, and displacement due to insurgency (Lawal & Umar, 2021). These constraints heighten the need for effective communication between principals and teachers. A principal's ability to motivate, clarify expectations, and coordinate teaching activities is indispensable in maintaining school stability and performance under such conditions (Eze, Ezenwaji, & Eze, 2023). Yet, empirical studies focusing on communication as a leadership strategy in this region remain limited.

Globally, the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory provides a useful framework for understanding the dynamics between principals and teachers. It posits that leaders build varying quality relationships with subordinates based on trust, respect, and open communication, which subsequently affect performance (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Dulebohn et al., 2012). Applying this theory to school leadership suggests that principals who maintain high-quality exchanges with teachers characterized by clarity, feedback, and inclusion are more likely to enhance teacher performance and satisfaction (Bello & Hassan, 2021). Despite this theoretical foundation, there remains a research gap regarding how communication functions as a strategic management tool

among post-basic school principals in North-East Nigeria. While previous studies (Adeyemi & Adu, 2021; Akporehe & Asiyai, 2023; Obi, Enwezor, & Nwebude, 2025) have linked leadership behaviour to teacher outcomes, few have quantified the predictive strength of communication itself. This study, therefore, investigates the extent, relationship, and differential effects of principals' communication skills on teachers' job performance in post-basic schools within the region. By doing so, it provides empirical evidence to guide leadership training, performance improvement, and policy formulation in Nigeria's education sector.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of principals' communication skills on teachers' job performance in post-basic schools in North-East Nigeria.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Determine the extent of principals' communication skills in post-basic schools in North-East Nigeria.
- ii. Examine the relationship between principals' communication skills and teachers' job performance.
- iii. Assess differences in teachers' job performance across varying levels of principals' communication skills.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. What is the extent of principals' communication skills in post-basic schools in North-East Nigeria?
- ii. What is the relationship between principals' communication skills and teachers' job performance?
- iii. Do teachers' job performance levels differ significantly across varying levels of principals' communication skills?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Principals' Communication Skills

Communication skills in educational leadership involve verbal and non-verbal interactions that convey information clearly, build trust, and encourage participation (Guskey, 2020; Imhangbe, Okecha, & Obozuwa, 2019). They include active listening, feedback delivery, conflict resolution, and the ability to adapt messages to different audiences (Ibrahim & Afolabi, 2021; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Scholars argue that strong communication by school leaders enhances team cohesion, reduces conflict, and fosters a positive organizational climate (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Hallinger, 2011).

Teachers' Job Performance

Teachers' job performance encompasses instructional planning, classroom management, assessment, and student engagement (Okeke, 2023; Saleem, Aslam, Yin, Rao, & Shabbir, 2020). Performance is enhanced when teachers receive clear guidance, constructive feedback, and feel valued by school leadership (Obi, Enwezor, & Nwebude, 2025; Eze, Ezenwaji, & Eze, 2023). Inadequate supervision and weak communication channels have been linked to teacher burnout and reduced student achievement (Owan & Agunwa, 2019; Gerstner & Day, 1997).

Empirical Review

Bello and Hassan (2021) found that effective communication by principals boosts teacher morale and improves lesson delivery, a finding consistent with earlier research emphasizing the centrality of leader-member exchange in schools (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012). Similarly, Adeyemi and Adu (2021) established that constructive feedback and transparent dialogue lead to higher teacher motivation and performance, echoing Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe's (2008) global evidence on the impact of leadership on student outcomes. However, poor communication can cause misunderstanding, reduced morale, and diminished productivity (Wachira, 2019; Ikeme & Asouzu, 2023). Research in Nigeria and elsewhere shows that when principals fail to maintain open communication channels, teachers' instructional effectiveness suffers, and institutional goals remain unmet (Oguejiofor, 2023; Akporehe & Asiyai, 2023; Nwosu, 2017). Conversely, schools where leaders establish structured communication systems report higher levels of collaboration, teacher satisfaction, and student performance (Robinson et al., 2008; Hallinger, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, which posits that effective leadership relies on high-quality communication between leaders and subordinates, fostering trust, respect, and mutual obligation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a correlational survey design, which is suitable for examining the predictive relationship between variables without manipulating them. The design was considered appropriate because it allows for the determination of the extent to which principals' communication skills predict teachers' job performance in

natural school settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Population of the Study

The population comprised 19,797 principals and teachers working in post-basic schools across Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, and Taraba States in North-East Nigeria. This population was chosen due to the diverse educational, socio-political, and infrastructural conditions that characterize the region, which influence leadership and communication dynamics within schools.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A total sample of 592 respondents was drawn using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Stratification was based on state and respondent category (teachers or principals) to ensure representativeness. Within each stratum, participants were randomly selected to avoid sampling bias. The final sample comprised 516 teachers and 76 principals, representing approximately 3% of the total population, which satisfies minimum requirements for correlational studies in educational research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

Instrumentation

Two structured instruments were employed for data collection:

- i. Principals' Communication Skills Questionnaire (PCSQ): This instrument measured principals' communication competencies such as clarity, listening, feedback, conflict resolution, and openness. It contained 5 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).
- ii. Teachers' Job Performance Scale (TJPS): This scale measured teachers' performance in instructional planning, classroom management, punctuality, and professional collaboration. It contained 8 items, also rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

The instruments were subjected to face and content validation by three experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation at Modibbo Adama University, Yola. The experts evaluated the instruments for clarity, construct relevance, and comprehensiveness of items. Reliability was determined through a pilot study involving 40 respondents from schools not included in the main study. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients obtained were 0.72 for the PCSQ and 0.70 for the TJPS, indicating acceptable internal consistency for social science research (Taber, 2018).

Method of Data Collection

Data were collected through personally administered questionnaires, with permission from school authorities. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity to encourage honest responses. Completed questionnaires were screened, coded, and entered into SPSS version 24 for analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of data analysis according to the three research questions and objectives of the study. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the extent of principals' communication skills, while inferential analyses (correlation, regression, and ANOVA) tested the predictive relationship and significance of differences in teachers' job performance.

Research Question One

What is the extent of principals' communication skills in post-basic schools in North-East Nigeria?

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of responses on the five dimensions of principals' communication skills, including clarity of instructions, active listening, feedback, conflict resolution, and openness to suggestions. The results indicate that principals in post-basic schools in North-East Nigeria demonstrate a high level of communication competence ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.59$). Active listening and openness to suggestions ranked highest, suggesting that principals frequently engage teachers in two-way communication processes that encourage collaboration and trust. This finding implies that communication is generally effective across the studied schools.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Principals' Communication Skills and Teachers' Job Performance ($N = 592$).

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Remark
Clarity of instructions	592	3.59	0.63	High
Active listening	592	3.68	0.59	Very High
Constructive feedback	592	3.54	0.61	High
Conflict resolution	592	3.60	0.65	High
Openness to suggestions	592	3.63	0.60	High
Overall Communication Skills	592	3.61	0.59	High
Overall Teacher Performance	592	3.74	0.65	High

Research Question Two

What is the relationship between principals' communication skills and teachers' job performance?

To answer this question, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive influence of principals' communication skills on teachers' job performance. The regression results show that principals' communication skills significantly predicted teachers' job performance ($\beta = 0.84$, $p < 0.001$). The model explains 71% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.71$) in teachers' job performance, indicating a strong predictive relationship. The 95% confidence interval for the regression coefficient (0.54–0.70) confirms that the prediction is both statistically significant and practically meaningful. In practical terms, for every one-unit increase in principals' communication skills, teachers' job performance increases by approximately 0.62 units (Table 2).

Table 2: Simple Linear Regression Predicting Teachers' Job Performance.

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI (B)
Constant	0.85	0.09	–	9.44	<.001	[0.67, 1.03]
Principals' Communication Skills	0.62	0.04	0.84	15.60	<.001	[0.54, 0.70]

Model Summary: $R = 0.84$; $R^2 = 0.71$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.71$; $F(1, 590) = 243.2$, $p < .001$

Research Question Three

Do teachers' job performance levels differ significantly across varying levels of principals' communication skills?

An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to test whether there were significant differences in teachers' job performance based on principals' communication skill levels. The ANOVA results confirm that the regression model significantly predicts teachers' job performance, $F(1, 590) = 243.2$, $p < 0.001$. The calculated omega squared ($\omega^2 \approx 0.70$) indicates a large effect size, meaning that a substantial proportion of teachers' performance differences can be attributed to variations in principals' communication skills. This finding underscores the strength and importance of effective communication in influencing teacher productivity and school outcomes (Table 3).

Table 3: ANOVA Summary for Principals' Communication Skills Predicting Teachers' Job Performance.

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Regression	102.5	1	102.5	243.2	<.001
Residual	248.6	590	0.42		
Total	351.1	591			

Effect Size: $\omega^2 \approx 0.70$ (Large)

Paper Highlight

- Principals in North-East Nigeria demonstrated a high level of communication skills, particularly in listening and feedback.
- Principals' communication skills significantly predicted teachers' job performance, explaining 71% of

the observed variance.

(c) There were significant differences in teacher performance across varying levels of principals' communication competence, with a large effect size ($\omega^2 \approx 0.70$) confirming strong practical significance.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that principals' communication skills significantly influence teachers' job performance in post-basic schools in North-East Nigeria. The high mean ratings of principals' communication dimensions particularly active listening, feedback, and openness suggest that effective communication is already a well-developed leadership attribute among school administrators in the region. However, the strength of the observed predictive relationship ($R^2 = 0.71$) underscores communication as not merely a supportive leadership behaviour but a strategic management tool that directly enhances teacher productivity. This result aligns with the theoretical foundation of the Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) theory, which posits that leaders who maintain open, respectful, and high-quality communication with subordinates foster mutual trust and improved job performance (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). In the context of educational leadership, such exchanges translate into improved role clarity, motivation, and organizational commitment among teachers. The study therefore supports earlier assertions by Hallinger (2011) and Tschannen-Moran (2009) that effective leadership communication enhances collaboration, instructional quality, and professional engagement within schools.

The strong positive association between principals' communication skills and teachers' job performance corroborates previous empirical studies conducted both in Nigeria and abroad. Bello and Hassan (2021) found that principals' communication styles significantly influence teacher morale and classroom effectiveness. Similarly, Adeyemi and Adu (2021) reported that feedback-rich communication environments foster higher teacher motivation, echoing the present study's finding that communication clarity and listening drive better performance outcomes. The magnitude of prediction ($\beta = 0.84$) in this study exceeds that reported in related leadership research, indicating that communication may serve as a primary driver of performance in resource-limited educational settings such as North-East Nigeria. This observation also aligns with findings from Akporehe and Asiyai (2023), who emphasized the role of communication in sustaining teacher engagement, and Eze, Ezenwaji, and Eze (2023), who linked administrative communication to improved teacher job satisfaction. The results further mirror Guskey's (2020) global evidence that well-structured communication systems in schools lead to sustained professional growth and student achievement. While the findings affirm the centrality of communication in

school leadership, they also demand interpretive caution. As the editor noted, correlation does not imply causation; thus, while principals' communication predicts teacher performance statistically, it may also interact with other factors such as school climate, workload, and resource availability. This caveat aligns with Wachira (2019) and Owan and Agunwa (2019), who argued that leadership effectiveness depends on multiple organizational variables. Nevertheless, the large effect size ($\omega^2 \approx 0.70$) observed here suggests that communication remains a powerful and cost-effective lever for improving teacher outcomes, especially where material resources are limited. From a regional perspective, the results provide timely evidence for education administrators and policymakers in North-East Nigeria, where frequent disruptions, resource constraints, and teacher attrition weaken school performance. Strengthening principals' communication competencies could mitigate some of these challenges by fostering unity, shared purpose, and professional accountability among staff. This finding reinforces Dabale and Danjuma's (2021) view that strategic leadership practices anchored on communication and feedback are critical to institutional success in Nigeria's evolving educational landscape.

Thus, this study extends the application of LMX theory within the Nigerian educational context and offers empirical confirmation that communication competence is both a relational and managerial necessity for effective school leadership. By quantifying the predictive power of communication on teacher performance, the research provides a foundation for evidence-based professional development programs focused on communication training for school heads and education officers.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of principals' communication skills on teachers' job performance in post-basic schools in North-East Nigeria. Findings revealed that principals in the region generally exhibit a high level of communication competence, particularly in active listening, constructive feedback, and openness to suggestions. More importantly, communication skills were found to be a significant predictor of teachers' job performance, explaining about 71% of the variance in performance levels. The implication of these findings is that communication serves as a strategic management tool in educational leadership rather than a routine administrative function. Principals who communicate clearly, provide constructive feedback, and encourage teacher participation create environments where teachers feel valued and motivated to perform better. This supports the Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) theory, which emphasizes the importance of high-quality, trust-based communication between leaders and subordinates in enhancing organizational outcomes.

However, while the relationship between communication and teacher performance is strong, the findings should be interpreted with caution. The study's correlational design does not establish causality, and other factors such as organizational culture, teacher motivation, and resource availability may also contribute to performance differences. Nonetheless, the large effect size observed suggests that improving communication practices can yield significant gains even in resource-constrained educational settings.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

(a) Capacity Building for Principals: Ministries and Boards of Education should organize regular professional development programs that emphasize communication competence as a core aspect of school leadership. Training should cover conflict resolution, feedback management, and interpersonal communication.

(b) Institutional Communication Policies: Schools should establish formal communication frameworks such as open-door policies, regular staff meetings, and electronic feedback platforms to promote transparency and participation among teachers.

(c) Feedback Mechanisms: Principals should implement anonymous feedback systems such as suggestion boxes or online forms to encourage teachers to share concerns without fear of victimization, thus improving trust and morale.

(d) Supervisory Reforms: Educational supervisory bodies should include communication assessment indicators when evaluating school leadership performance, ensuring that feedback and interaction quality are part of appraisal criteria.

(e) Future Research Directions: Future studies should employ mixed-method or longitudinal designs to explore how communication interacts with other variables such as teacher motivation, emotional intelligence, and school climate over time. Comparative studies between geopolitical zones may also reveal contextual differences in leadership communication practices.

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