

SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' TACTICAL PLANNING STRATEGIES AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN AGUATA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the crucial role of tactical planning in achieving meaningful and sustainable school improvement in public secondary schools within Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State. It focused on understanding how, a short-term approach, can drive targeted actions and measurable progress in student achievement, teaching quality, and overall school improvement. Employing a descriptive survey design, data were gathered from 100 educators (principals, departmental heads, and teachers) using proportional stratified random sampling and a validated questionnaire. Reliability of the instrument was conducted using Cronbach's alpha and a reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the collated data. Findings reveal that tactical planning strategies are vital for advancing school improvement through actionable steps that address local needs. However, challenges such as insufficient resources, ineffective communication, and weak monitoring systems hinder their success. The study recommends that policymakers in education should provide school leaders with adequate training, resources, and structural support to effectively implement tactical plans for lasting improvement.

Keywords: school principals, tactical planning, strategic planning, short-term, school improvement, actionable strategies, challenges, tactics

Introduction

Background to the study

In the dynamic landscape of education, marked by rapid technological

advancements, and increasing global competition, proactive school improvement is not merely an aspiration but a necessity. The pivotal role of school principals in steering this improvement cannot be overstated, particularly in their capacity to

translate broad educational goals into actionable steps that enhance teaching practices, curriculum development, and overall student support. This endeavor is especially critical in contexts facing significant hurdles, such as Anambra State, where primary and secondary schools grapple with challenges ranging from inadequate infrastructure and learning resources to a shortage of qualified educators and ineffective management (Ogunode, 2020). While strategic planning provides the overarching vision for school advancement, it is through the pragmatic application of tactical planning that principals can effectively address immediate needs, optimize resource utilization, and foster stakeholder engagement to achieve tangible improvements in school outcomes (Gaudet, 2021; Whatagraph, 2021). This paper delves into the specific ways school principals in such environments leverage tactical planning strategies to elevate school performance. Furthermore, it critically examines the inherent challenges that impede the successful implementation of these vital tactical approaches.

Tactical planning, characterized by its focus on short-term objectives, defined timelines, and efficient resource distribution (Robson, 2016), serves as a critical mechanism for schools to operationalize broader educational mandates, such as the global emphasis on quality and inclusive education articulated in initiatives like Education for All (EFA) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) (UNESCO, 2015). In localized contexts, particularly in resource-constrained

environments like Aguata, where school leaders frequently contend with funding and staffing limitations, the ability of tactical planning to translate national education policies into feasible, localized actions becomes indispensable for fostering educational advancement (Fulla, 2016; Okoroma, 2006). Despite this evident significance, a notable gap exists in research specifically, examining the impact of tactical planning on school improvement within Nigeria. Existing studies predominantly concentrate on strategic planning at broader policy levels, often overlooking the immediate management challenges encountered by school leaders in their day-to-day operations (Adegbesan, 2011). This research endeavors to address this lacuna by investigating how tactical planning contributes to school improvement at the secondary school level within Aguata Local Government Area (L. G. A.). The aim is to understand how the strategic application of tactical planning aids in enhancing student learning outcomes, elevating teaching quality, strengthening school leadership, and fostering supportive learning environments (Hopkins, 2013).

Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to examine the tactical planning strategies utilized by school principals in achieving overall school improvement in public secondary schools in Aguata L G A. Specifically, the study intends to:

1. Ascertain how school principals use tactical planning strategies to improve school outcomes.
2. Identify the challenges school leaders face in implementing tactical planning strategies effectively.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research Questions:

1. What are the tactical planning strategies school principals use for school improvement in public secondary schools in Aguata L G A?
2. What challenges do school principals face in implementing tactical planning strategies in public secondary schools in Aguata L.G.A?

Review of Related Literature

Concept of School Improvement

School improvement refers to a process aimed at enhancing practices and building capacity to deliberately enhance student outcomes (Tran, 2018). The improvement may involve student academic achievements, engagement, wellbeing, community involvement, leadership and management, or any other aspect that contributes to the advancement of the school. It incorporates all stakeholders in education, including teachers, students, organizations, community members, parents, and others. Therefore, it can be described as a multifaceted and multilayered concept operating across

various dimensions of school life and at different levels (Hopkins, 2013). Crucially, it is important to pinpoint those areas requiring improvement and prioritize them.

The Role of Tactical Planning in School Improvement

Tactical planning is characterized as short-term planning that translates broader strategic objectives into specific, immediate actions (Gaudet, 2021). It centers on current tasks that propel a school toward its long-term objectives and aids in aligning the efforts of administrators, educators, and support staff. Furthermore, it encompasses the allocation of resources, setting timelines and deadlines, defining responsibilities, and judicious use of resources to achieve specific educational outcomes. Tactical planning guarantees that daily and weekly school activities are in alignment with the school's improvement objectives. As stated by Barney and Griffin (1992), well-defined goals provide direction, guide planning efforts, and motivate staff. Schools lacking clear goals often find it difficult to reach their targets. Goals, vision, and mission statement must be in alignment to bolster improvement initiatives (Vaughan, 2016). Establishing short-term, measurable goals enables schools to monitor progress and promptly address issues, thus enhancing both instruction and learning (Bhasin, 2020). Goals must be in alignment with the vision to make progress.

Another critical component is resource allocation, which guarantees that personnel, funds, materials, and time are utilized

effectively (Hart, 2019). In environments with limited resources, tactical planning aids in prioritizing pressing needs and ensures the fair and efficient use of available resources (White, 2018).

Setting timelines and deadlines keeps improvement initiatives on schedule. This practice fosters discipline, supports accountability, and assists school leaders in measuring progress (Whatagraph, 2021). In resource-constrained settings, school leaders frequently formulate straightforward action plans to address urgent concerns such as overcrowded classrooms or deficits in teaching materials (Lunenburg, 2010). These small-scale actions can yield significant effects when resources are allocated wisely.

Ibrahim and Usman (2020) emphasize that effective resource management enhances learning environments and leads to improved student outcomes. Tactical planning also provides flexibility, permitting schools to adapt to unanticipated changes such as funding delays (Ogunode, 2020). Essentially, tactical planning serves as a crucial driver of school improvement by converting long-term visions into achievable actions, it guarantees focused execution, accountability, and measurable advancements in educational quality and outcomes. For example, a school aiming to become a hub for digital learning may develop tactical plans to introduce ICT classes, train teachers, and equip labs (Okeke, 2025). This step-by-step process goes a long way toward achieving stated educational goals. Therefore, schools that employ tactical planning to establish clear

goals, allocate resources appropriately, and manage time efficiently create a strong foundation for significant progress (Gaudet, 2021; Vaughan, 2016).

Challenges to Effective Implementation of Tactical Planning

Several factors can impede tactical planning implementation in educational institutions, including:

1. **Insufficient resources:** Shortages of financial, human, and material resources can restrict a school's capacity to implement tactical plans (UNESCO, 2020).
2. **Ineffective communication:** When school goals and strategies are not communicated clearly, efforts can become fragmented (Gaudet, 2021).
3. **Resistance to change:** Staff and other stakeholders may push back against new initiatives, especially if they were not included in the planning process.
4. **Monitoring and evaluation:** Without efficient monitoring systems, it becomes challenging to track advancements and make necessary adjustments (Ololube, 2013).
5. **Time constraints:** Significant workloads and demanding academic schedules can leave little room for comprehensive planning.
6. **Poor leadership skills:** School leaders may not possess the technical and managerial skills essential for

creating and executing effective tactical plans (Bush, 2007).

7. Unclear objectives: Ambiguous and unrealistic goals can hinder the successful implementation of tactical plans.

8. Inadequate monitoring and evaluation: Ineffective monitoring may fail to track progress and assess outcomes based on feedback.

9. Limited professional development: In the absence of ongoing training and capacity-building opportunities, staff may struggle to implement plans successfully (Ololube, 2013).

Methods

This research utilized a descriptive survey design to investigate how school leaders in Aguata L.G.A. employ tactical planning strategies and the challenges they face. The target population includes school principals,

departmental heads, and teachers from selected public secondary schools in Aguata L G A. The study employed proportional stratified random sampling to select 100 respondents. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire tag “Tactical Planning and School Improvement” consisting of two sections: Section A assesses the use of tactical planning strategies, while Section B explores implementation challenges. A four-point Likert scale (ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) was utilized to gather responses.

The Cronbach Alpha was used to test the reliability of the instrument and the overall reliability obtained was 0.81, indicating that the instruments were reliable and consistent for the study. Data was administered and collected from selected respondents by the researcher and a research assistant. The collated data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation).

Presentation and Data Analysis

Table 1: Respondents' Perceptions of Tactical Planning Strategies and School Improvement

s/n	Items	M	SD	Decisions
1	School leaders set clear short-term goals to achieve strategic educational objectives.	2.54	0.64	Agreed
2	Tactics are used to implement school development activities.	2.83	0.78	Agreed
3	There is a clear allocation of resources to support short-term school objectives.	2.77	0.88	Agreed

4	Tactics are used to respond quickly to emerging school issues.	3.20	0.61	Agreed
5	Regular staff meetings are held to track progress on action plans.	2.89	0.84	Agreed
6	Students' performance is monitored to evaluate tactical decisions.	2.23	0.52	Disagreed
7	Leadership in the school promotes a culture of tactical planning for continuous improvement.	2.74	0.85	Agreed
8	Tactics have led to improvements in teaching and learning processes.	2.67	0.73	Agreed
9	School activities are aligned with the overall mission and vision of the school.	2.54	0.67	Agreed
10	Teachers are involved in decision-making processes related to school improvement	2.65	0.69	Agreed
11	Specific timelines and deadlines are used to implement school improvement plans.	2.52	0.54	Agreed
Grand Mean		2.68		Agreed

Table 1 illustrates the perceptions of respondents regarding tactical planning strategies and school enhancement. Respondents concur that “school leaders establish clear short-term objectives” (2.54), “tactics are utilized to execute school activities” (2.83), “resources are allocated clearly” (2.77), “tactics are employed to swiftly address emerging issues” (3.20), “regular staff meetings are conducted to monitor progress” (2.89). “Student performance is monitored to assess tactical decisions” (2.23), “leadership within the school fosters a culture of continuous improvement” (2.74). “Tactics have led to advancements in teaching and learning” (2.67), “school activities are aligned with the overall mission and vision of the school” (2.54), “teachers participate in decision-making” (2.65), and “specific timelines are established for implementing school improvements” (2.52). The data indicates that respondents agreed on all items as tactical planning strategies contributing to school improvement, except for item 6: “tactics are consistently reviewed and modified for better outcomes,” which received a mean score of (2.23). The overall mean of 2.68

reflects a relatively lower level of agreement. The standard deviation scores ranging from 0.52 to 0.88 imply a degree of consistency in the perceptions of respondents.

Table 2: Challenges Faced by School Leaders in Implementing Tactical Planning in Achieving School Improvement

<i>n/s</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Decisions</i>
1	Inadequate funding limits the effective implementation of tactical plans.	3.22	0.68	Agreed
2	There is a shortage of qualified staff to execute tactical planning strategies.	3.28	0.76	Agreed
3	Poor communication between school leadership and staff affects plan implementation	3.30	0.87	Agreed
4	Resistance to change among staff hinders tactical planning efforts.	3.14	0.78	Agreed
5	Time constraints prevent school managers from developing and following through on tactical plans	3.32	0.75	Agreed
6	Poor leadership skills to implement tactical plans.	3.29	0.65	Agreed
7	The lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms makes tactical plans ineffective.	2.89	0.83	Agreed
8	School leaders lack access to data to inform tactical planning decisions	2.65	0.72	Agreed
9	Delayed government support hinders the timely implementation of plans	2.86	0.68	Agreed
10	Monitoring and evaluation of plans are not consistently carried out	3.14	0.83	Agreed
Grand mean		3.10		Agreed

Table 2 highlights challenges such as "time constraints" (3.32), "poor communication" (3.30), "poor leadership skills" (3.29), "shortage of qualified staff" (3.28), "inadequate funding" (3.22), "resistance to change among staff" (3.14), and "monitoring and evaluation of plans" (3.14). The overall average of 3.10 indicates that all the listed items were perceived as challenges to the successful implementation of tactical planning in public secondary schools in Aguata L.G.A. The standard deviation scores between 0.65 and 0.87 reflect a degree of consistency.

Discussion of Findings

Table 1 shows that principals in public secondary schools in Aguata L.G.A. utilize tactical planning strategies to meet immediate educational needs, set short-term objectives, and align activities with broader strategic aims. This is consistent with Gaudet (2021), who pointed out that tactical planning enables educational administrators to translate strategic goals into actionable steps that address immediate issues. Likewise, Barney and Griffin (1992) contend that clearly defined goals motivate staff and provide direction for planning endeavors, a perspective supported by this study's finding that school leaders set short-term goals and engage staff in monitoring progress.

In addition, the high mean score ($M = 3.20$) for the item "tactics are employed to swiftly address emerging school concerns" reinforces Lunenburg's (2010) assertion that tactical plans provide management flexibility, especially in unpredictable and resource-scarce settings. Fulla (2016) also argued that tactical planning at the school level functions as a mechanism to interpret and implement national educational policies through timely and practical interventions, especially in low-resource environments like those found in Aguata.

However, the research also revealed weaknesses in utilizing student performance data to inform tactical decisions ($M = 2.23$). This indicates a deficiency in evidence-based planning. According to Hopkins (2013), improving schools necessitates robust monitoring of student outcomes to assess and modify interventions. The absence of solid monitoring systems, as emphasized by Ibrahim and Usman (2020), undermines accountability and hinders the ability to track advancements in school improvement.

Table 2 also indicates that school leaders encounter significant obstacles, including time limitations, ineffective communication, and poor leadership capabilities, which hinder tactical planning. This aligns with UNESCO (2020), who noted that insufficient funding, a lack of staff, and weak support frameworks are prevalent barriers to effective school planning in developing areas. Time constraints received the highest mean score (3.32), underscoring the argument made by Whatagraph (2021) and Gaudet (2021) that school leaders are often overwhelmed with administrative responsibilities, which restricts the time available for comprehensive tactical planning. Furthermore, Hill and Jones (2012) pointed out that in the absence of stable leadership, school improvement plans

frequently face disruption, a concern corroborated by the high score for leadership turnover in this study ($M = 3.29$).

Communication failures between school leadership and staff were also identified as a prominent challenge ($M = 3.30$). This supports Vaughan's (2016) observation that shared understanding and collaboration are vital to successful school planning. Resistance to change from staff ($M = 3.14$) may indicate the absence of inclusive planning practices, which Okoroma (2006) argued are crucial for effective school leadership in Nigeria.

Implications of the Findings

The results indicate that although school principals acknowledge and utilize tactical planning, various obstacles hinder its complete effectiveness. As Adegbesan (2011) pointed out, much of the discussions surrounding planning in Nigerian education have centered on strategic planning at the level of policy, frequently overlooking the operational challenges faced by school leaders.

This study's focus on tactical planning offers a practical perspective for enhancing school-based management (UNESCO (2015) highlighted that the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education) necessitates localized and context-aware leadership strategies exactly the function that effective tactical planning can fulfill.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Despite its valuable contributions, the study is constrained by its use of self-reported information, which may contain biases. Additionally, the specific focus on Aguata L.G.A. restricts the ability to generalize findings. Future research could involve: Mixed methods (such as interviews and case studies) for more in-depth understanding, Objective performance indicators (like student achievement scores) to confirm planning outcomes, and Comparative studies across different regions to uncover wider trends in tactical planning among Nigerian schools.

Conclusion

Consistent with existing literature, the study reinforces that tactical planning is crucial for advancing school improvement initiatives by concentrating on short-term, actionable strategies that address contextual realities. Nonetheless, ongoing issues such as insufficient resources, ineffective communication, and weak monitoring systems impede its success. For lasting improvement, policymakers in education need to provide school leaders with adequate training, resources, and structural support to execute tactical plans effectively

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