

# PERCEIVED IMPACT OF STUDENTS' ATTRITION ON ADMINISTRATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BENUE STATE

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## **Abstract**

*This study investigated perceived impact of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools in Benue state. Three research questions and hypotheses guided and tested the study. The study was a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised all the principals of secondary schools in the study area. Stratified sampling technique was used to sample 50 school principals (40 males and 10 females) as the respondents for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a research questionnaire. Data were analyzed using mean score and standard deviation to answer research questions. The mean score cut-off point of 2.50 was used in which any mean item less than 2.50 was not agreed. The t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study shows that students' attrition negatively affects administration of secondary school in Benue North East Senatorial District and there is significant mean difference between male and female principals as regard students' attrition. It was therefore concluded that institutions and school administrators should evolve effective strategies that will lead to retention of students in secondary schools. This will help reduce the rate of attrition; parents or guidance should consider the education financial needs of their children and make it a priority so as to encourage them to persist in schools and school administrators should employ the services of guidance and counselors. The guidance and counselors should help to rebuild confidence in students as this will make them become resilient from their inability to concentrate on their academic activities.*

**Key words:** *Students' Attrition, Secondary School, Guidance and Counseling*

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## Introduction

The broad goal of secondary education, according to the National Policy on Education is to prepare the individual for useful living within the society and higher education, (FRN, 2014). One of the ways through which these laudable goals could be achieved is by effective school administration to ensure students' retention for enhanced teaching and learning. Today, one of the glaring challenges facing educational administrators is students' attrition. Students' attrition has become a recurrent challenge in schools across the globe with Nigeria in no exception. It is the experience for most educational administrators globally both in primary, secondary and tertiary education levels. Effective secondary school administration could be affected by students' attrition. Duze (2011) states that, attrition rates were high for both primary and secondary schools in Nigeria thus, it becomes a critical point for any school administrative practices experiencing a wide spread attrition.

Gütl, Rizzardini, Chang, and Morales (2014), in their study on attrition in Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) define attrition to mean a decline in the number of students who initially enroll to undertake a course of study by the end of the course. Ramist (1981) in Adusei-Asante and Doh (2016) offered three explanations of students' attrition. These include a situation where a student is offer admission but does not report to school; accepts admission and starts school but drops out at the early hours of admission; and drops out in the middle of the course. McQueen (2009) connects attrition to situations where students withdraw from the process of education or are unable to complete their course of study. While students' attrition may be more specifically defined within a particular context, it is generally the number of students who leave the school before the end of session or term.

The rate of students' attrition is described by Bua (2016) as the degree at which the input into a system wears or thins down and or simply the cut down of the input into the educational system. This can be so alarming that students' attrition tends to be a systematic concern for many school administrators because it affects the educational goals to be achieved. The withdrawal of students which is often sudden, cause interruption to the administrative practice of most school administrators (Bua, 2016). The ability to address the perceived interruption brought about by sudden massive drop-out of students from a given school is important to educators and researchers in the field of educational administration. This is because, most school administrators are not prepared to face the problem before it occurs even though it is a phenomenon that affects all levels of education but it appears to be more noticeable at the secondary school level. Wastage in terms of students' attrition cannot be afforded, hence school administrators whose responsibility is to manage these students will face the challenge of administering a school ravaged by students' attrition.

High rate of students' attrition imposes a lot of difficulties to school administration. According to Duze (2011), cases of students' attrition are not pre-planned for, thereby frustrating administrative procedures and program schedule for the school term or session. Egwu and Anyawu (2010) stress that, most times, students' attrition brings about reduced students' population which does not align well with administrative practices in schools. Taylor (2005) asserts that students generally do not intend to drop out of school when they first enrolled and that, unfavourable conditions within and without the school might have compelled them to withdraw from school. Taylor adds that to retain them sometimes school policies like school rules and regulations and even tuition fees are reduced leaving difficulties for school management. Michael (2017)

asserts that, competent management is ability to meet organizational objectives and use available resources efficiently. This implies that, the school manager could be blamed for not being competent where attrition of school personnel becomes frequent in such a school. It suggests that students' retention rate is a factor of school administration. This means that the school manager or administrator plays a vital role in the issue of students' retention. Although the factor of school manager may not be the sole cause of students' attrition in the school system as other variables may also be responsible.

Attrition is an issue that has bedeviled secondary education in Nigeria for years with its causes not only attributed to the factor of educational manager. Several causes have been advanced by various scholars. For instance, Ramsey (2017), explains that financial concerns are the number one reason why students drop-out of college today. This means that poverty measures the rate of attrition of students. Consequently, when parents are not able to fulfill the financial obligation as a result of lack of money, it could result to withdrawal of their wards from school. Egwu and Anyanwu (2010) found that poor academic ability and family pressure were responsible for most of the experienced cases of students' attrition in the educational system in Nigeria. These reasons are similar to that of Glossop, (2002) who attributed withdrawal of students from a University programme to family issues, difficulties in coping with academic pressure and financial difficulties.

A study conducted at Griffith University (Griffith Quality, Planning and Statistics Unit, 2008) as reported by Adusei and Doh (2016), found personal difficulties stemming from health, family and the general difficulty of integration with other students. There were also reasons of academic difficulties including weak skills and knowledge in some course, low GPA score, wrong subject choices, loss of interest in programme and total dissatisfaction with the college experience, quality of curriculum or teaching. The factors of students' attrition need to be understood in order to develop the means of mitigating the problem. While the factors most related to students' persistence will likely depend on the unique situation of a given institution and its students population, awareness of these typical factors may help colleges and universities develop their own systems for tracking and understanding their students' behaviour, that with such knowledge, institutions will be better able to identify students particular at-risk of dropping out, as well as develop programmes and practices that can address the issues determining their decision to stay or leave for if this is not so attrition will leave its burden on school administration with its attendant cost effect.

As a cut down of input into educational system (Bua 2016), students' attrition represents wastage in school system, the withdrawal of students lead to adjustment in budgetary allocation, reduced subvention and the fall in Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) among others. The effect also goes beyond constraining the administrator financially because he or she may be forced to use his or her personal fund to cater for repairs, purchase office utilities and care for the welfare of staff and students as against a population that retains 100% of enrolled students. Nakpodia (2010) posits that attrition imposes administrative challenge to school administrators, noting that students' dropping out of school was a common phenomenon in secondary schools in most states of Nigeria. Similarly, Neal (2013) found revenue loss from attrition in colleges and this agrees that there is cost effect of students' attrition. The Neal further pointed out that, each student who leaves the school, takes his or her tuition fees and other revenue the school might have been able to collect from the students and reasons that, cost affects the revenue that schools count on to support operations and believes that every student

equates to a lifetime value for a school that is equal to the amount of money in immediate revenue as well as potential future revenue in the form of future tuition fees. Therefore, when a student leaves the school, the revenue received through tuition is lost. Kolar (2012) discovered that the high attrition rates in schools pose a high cost for students, institutions, taxpayers and the general populace. The finding confirms the fact that there is cost effect brought about by students' attrition. Thus, the management of a school experiencing the cost effect of students' attrition could have difficulty in school administrator. According to Bennett (2003) and, Schneider and Yin (2011) attrition has become a concern for any type of educational or certification program in that costs are incurred with respect to time, resources and tuition for students, faculty, institutions and other members of society.

The need to retain students has become imperative to mitigate the negative effective of students' attrition on administration of schools. Therefore, Taylor (2005) propose that educational institutions owe it to students to provide the best educational experiences so that they may likely stay and complete school successfully. In responding to the problem of education attrition, a number of best practices have proved to be yielding significant results. For example in the United Kingdom, as noted by Thomas (2012) in his report on what works student retention and success, a number of actions proved effective in promoting retention. The Student Retention & Success programme was an initiative of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation in collaboration with Higher Education Council for England. The project involved 22 institutions of higher education in England. Central to what works in promoting retention, Thomas (2012) observed that the issue of building engagement and belonging was critical. The contention was that when students felt isolated and did not have that sense of belonging; their only alternative was to withdraw. In effect, the education institutions that built effective engagement and belonging systems with students were better able to retain students. Some of the activities that promoted engagement and belonging include supportive and peer mentoring relationships, meaningful interaction between staff and students, developing knowledge, confidence and identity as a successful higher education learner and learning experiences tailored to interest and future goals.

In South Africa, the University of Pretoria for example, Ogude, Kilfoil, and Du Plessis (2012) observed that using an institutional module proved very effective in resolving the problem of attrition that bedeviled the institution, especially among 'black students'. The module employed a three-pronged approach including improving the first year experience of students, promoting a faculty-driven approach where each faculty took the institutional responsibility of promoting retention and finally the student embedded approach which sought to integrate students into the academic and social life of the University. The authors found that at the end of the programme, students were well-targeted, received comprehensive academic, psychosocial, financial and other support using proven high impact practices. Some of the strategies used were, supplementary instruction, peer-mentoring, academic advising and psychosocial counselling. As seen in the case of UK, Pretoria's strategy was anchored on a good mentoring system that created a sense of belonging for students and encouraged them to stay.

Moreover, in Australia, a number of strategies have also been noted. As observed by Maher and Macallister (2013) in their study of retention and attrition in higher education using the case of the School of Education, Notre Dame University, Sydney campus. These researchers observed that one important feature of retention among

students were the introduction of pastoral care and integrated mentoring programme. The programme provided opportunities for close contact between faculty and students. Mentors who were mostly course coordinators bridged this gap. The strategy was that during orientation a new student is linked up with a mentor who is completing the same course or higher. Similar programmes were implemented by Griffith University that proved effective in retention. At Griffith, they sought to increase personal contact and communication with and advice to students taking into account the nature and level of students diversity. The strategy also created a critical mass of Personal Advisers (Mentors) who were assigned a single point of contact to provide academic and pastoral support and increase students' engagement and connectedness to the school.

In essence, these strategies have proved to be effective at all level of education though, despite the efforts to ensure students' retention in schools in other countries and even in Nigeria. However, in Benue State, attrition has continued to rear its ugly head making it difficult for effective school administration. This study therefore set to investigate the perceived effect of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools in North East Senatorial District of Benue state as the study specifically aims at finding out principals' perception of students attrition, causes and cost of effect on administration of secondary schools.

### **Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is principals' perception of the negative effect of students' attrition on the administrative practices in secondary schools.
2. What are principals' perceived causes of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools.
3. What are the ways principals perceive cost effect of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools.

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant mean difference between male and female principals' perception of the negative effect of students' attrition on administration in secondary schools.
2. There is no significant mean difference between male and female principals' perceived causes of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools.
3. There is no significant mean difference in the ways male and female principals' perceive cost effect of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools.

### **Methodology**

This study employed descriptive survey research design. The study used qualitative research methodologies of open-ended questions and interviews schedule to collect data and explain phenomena more deeply using words/statements. The study was conducted in Benue North East Senatorial District, which is one of the three education zone in Benue state. The district has seven local government areas and each local government has at least 30 secondary schools. The population comprised all the principals of secondary schools in the study area. Stratified sampling technique was used to select samples from the population. It was deemed appropriate that since the research was based on heterogeneous population, to ensure that the desired representation from

various sub-groups from the population was achieved. The selected participants or respondents in the study comprised 50 school principals (40 males and 10 females) who are involved in the administration of the secondary schools. The respondents were randomly selected to reflect ownership diversity (i.e. both private and public owned schools). The instrument used for data collection for the conduct of this research was questionnaire titled: Students' Attrition and Administration of Secondary Schools Questionnaire (SAASSQ). The questionnaire contained 15 items with 5 items for each of the 3 research questions based on four point likert type scale of Strong Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D). The value of those options was 4,3,2,1 respectively. The cut off point for acceptance mean score was 2.50. Any mean item less than 2.50 was not accepted. Face and content validation of instrument was done by two research experts in Department of Educational Foundations in Benue State University, Makurdi. The questionnaire was administered to 50 respondents across the sampled schools using two research assistants who were chosen from Faculty of Education, Benue State University, Makurdi. The data generated were analyzed using mean score and standard deviation to answer research questions while t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

**Research Question 1:** What is principals' perception of negative effect of students' attrition on the administrative practices in secondary schools.

**Table 1:** Mean and standard deviations of principals' perception of the negative of students' attrition in the administration practices in secondary schools

Item No.	Items Description	No.	X	SD	Remark
1	Students' attrition distorts academic programmes	50	3.26	.97	Agreed
2	Attrition creates school under-population affecting effective school administration	50	2.94	.98	Agreed
3	Students' attrition is commonly experienced in schools	50	2.74	1.05	Agreed
4	Attrition sometimes force administrators to reduce tuition fees to retain students	50	2.66	1.21	Agreed
5	It determines administrators' administrative practices in schools	50	2.76	1.04	Agreed
<b>Cluster Mean and Standard Deviation</b>			<b>2.87</b>	<b>1.04</b>	<b>Agreed</b>

Table 1 shows that 50 of both male and female principals responded and agreed on all the five items with a mean range 2.66 – 3.26 and standard deviation of .97 – 1.21. The cluster mean of 2.87, which is above the cut-off point of 2.50 is therefore an indication of principal' perception of the negative effect of students' attrition on the administrative practices in secondary schools.

**Research Question 2:** What are principals' perceived causes of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools.

**Table 2:** Mean and standard deviations of principals' perceived causes of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools

Item No.	Items Description	No.	X	SD	Remark
1	Financial imbalance leads to students' attrition	50	2.86	.97	Agreed
2	Health, family and students' general difficulties causes attrition	50	3.14	1.89	Agreed
3	Students' academic disability results to attrition	50	2.76	1.04	Agreed
4	Stringent rules and regulations as well as strikes as institutional factors causes students' attrition	50	2.90	.91	Agreed
5	Lost of students' interest and total dissatisfaction with college experience causes attrition	50	2.58	1.05	Agreed
<b>Cluster Mean and Standard Deviation</b>			<b>2.85</b>	<b>1.17</b>	<b>Agreed</b>

Table 2 shows that 50 of both male and female principals responded and agreed on all the five items with a mean range 2.58 – 3.14 and standard deviation of .91 – 1.87. The cluster mean of 2.85, which is above the cut-off point of 2.50 therefore indicates that principals perceive the above items are the various causes of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools.

**Research Question 3:** What are the ways principals perceive cost effect of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools.

**Table 3:** Mean and standard deviation of ways principals perceive cost effect of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools

Item No.	Items Description	No.	X	SD	Remark
1	School experience reduced revenue as a result of students' attrition	50	3.18	1.08	Agreed
2	Attrition makes schools to involve in unnecessary borrowings	50	2.80	1.03	Agreed
3	Sometimes administrator use their personal funds in school administration as result of attrition	50	2.74	1.12	Agreed
4	Attrition sometimes force administrators to reduce tuition fees to retain students	50	2.88	1.12	Agreed
5	Because of students' attrition school get reduced subvention	50	2.74	1.16	Agreed
<b>Cluster Mean and Standard Deviation</b>			<b>2.87</b>	<b>1.10</b>	<b>Agreed</b>

Table 3 shows that 50 of both male and female principals responded and agreed on all the five items with a mean range 2.74 – 3.18 and standard deviation of 1.03 – 1.16. The cluster mean of 2.87, which is above the cut-off point of 2.50 therefore indicates that, the above items are the various ways principals perceive students' attrition has cost effect on administration of secondary schools.

**Table 4:** t-test analysis of male and female principals' perception of the negative effect of students' attrition on administrative practices of secondary schools

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	t-cal.	t-crit.	Level of Sig.	Decision
Male Principals	40	3.28	0.68	48	9.29	1.96	0.05	Rejected
Female Principals	10	1.24	0.30					

Table 4 shows that male principals have mean score of 3.28 and standard deviation of 0.68 greater than female principals mean score of 1.24 and standard deviation score of 0.30. The t-calculated value of 9.29 is greater than the t-critical value of 1.96 at 48df and 0.05 level significance. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This reveals that, there is significant mean difference between male and female principals' perceived causes of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools. There is significant mean difference between male and female principals' perception of the negative effect of students' attrition in administration of secondary schools.

**Table 5:** t-test analysis of male and female principals' perceived causes of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	t-cal.	t-crit.	Level of Sig.	of	Decision
Male Principals	40	3.23	0.68	48	8.71	1.96	0.05		Rejected
Female Principals	10	1.30	0.31						

Table 5 shows that male principals have mean score of 3.23 and standard deviation of 0.68 greater than female principals mean score of 1.30 and standard deviation score of 0.31. The t-calculated value of 8.71 is greater than the t-critical value of 1.96 at 48df and 0.05 level significance. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This reveals that, there is significant mean difference between male and female principals' perceived causes of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools.

**Table 6:** t-test analysis of ways male and female principals perceive cost effect of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	t-cal.	t-crit.	Level of Sig.	Decision
Male Principals	40	3.29	0.76	48	8.61	1.96	0.05	Rejected
Female Principals	10	1.18	0.27					

Table 6 shows that male principals have mean score of 3.29 and standard deviation of 0.76 greater than female principals mean score of 1.18 and standard deviation of 0.27. The t-calculated value of 8.61 is greater than the t-critical value of 1.96 at 48df and 0.05 level significance. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This reveals that, there is significant mean difference in the ways male and female principals perceive cost effect of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools.

### Discuss of Findings

The first finding indicates principals' perception of negative effect of students' attrition on administrative practices in secondary schools. The finding further shows a



significant mean difference between male and female principals' perception of the negative effect of students' attrition on administrative practices in secondary schools. This finding agrees with the view of Bua (2016) that, the withdrawal of students which is often sudden, cause interruption to the administrative practice of most school administrators. The finding further agrees with Duze (2010) who reported that, cases of students' attrition are not pre-planned for, thereby frustrating administrative procedures and programme schedule for the school term or session. In support of this finding, Egwu and Anyawu (2010) stress that most times, students' attrition brings about reduced students' population which does not align well with administrative practices in schools.

The second finding reveals principals' perceived causes of students' attrition in administration of secondary schools and also shows a significant mean difference between male and female principals' perceived causes of students' attrition in administration of secondary schools. The finding agrees with Ramsey (2017) who says that financial concerns are the number one reason why students drop-out of college today. This means that poverty measures the rate of attrition of students. Consequently, when parents are not able to fulfill the financial obligation as a result of lack of money, it could result to withdrawal of their wards from school. The finding is also in line with that of Egwu and Anyanwu (2010) who found that poor academic ability and family pressure were responsible for most of the experienced cases of students' attrition in the educational system in Nigeria. Similarly, the finding conform the view of Glossop (2002) who attributed withdrawal of students from a University programme to family issues, difficulties in coping with academic pressure and financial difficulties.

The third finding shows ways principals perceive cost effect of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools and also reveals that, there is significant mean difference in the ways male and female principals perceive cost effect of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools. The finding confirms the view of Nakpodia (2010) who posits that attrition imposes administrative challenge to school administrators, noting that students' dropping out of school was a common phenomenon in secondary schools in most states of Nigeria. The finding agree with that of Neal (2013) who found revenue loss from attrition in colleges and agrees that there is cost effect of students' attrition. Neal pointed out that, each student who leaves the school, takes his or her tuition fees and other revenue the school might have been able to collect from the students and reasons that, cost affects the revenue that schools count on to support operations and believes that every student equates to a lifetime value for a school that is equal to the amount of money in immediate revenue as well as potential future revenue in the form of future tuition fees. Therefore, when a student leaves the school, the revenue received through tuition is lost. In a similar notion the finding agree with Kolar (2012) who discovered that the high attrition rates in schools pose a high cost for students, institutions, taxpayers and the general populace. The finding confirms the fact that there is cost effect brought about by students' attrition.

## **Conclusion**

Students' attrition is found to be a common phenomenon in Nigerian schools making it difficult for school administrators to manage schools effectively. This paper investigated the perceived effect of students' attrition on administration of secondary schools in Benue state. The paper found negative effect of students' attrition on administrative practices in secondary schools. Several factors emanating to students' attrition and the cost effect of students' attrition were also identified. It is concluded from the study that unless deliberate strategies are evolved by the institutions and school administrators as well as the parent or guidance unless the phenomenon of students' attrition will continue unabated.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are made:

1. Institutions and school administrators should evolve effective strategies that will lead to retention of students in secondary schools. This will help reduce the rate of attrition.
2. Parents or guidance should consider the education financial needs of their children and make it a priority so as to encourage them to persist in schools.
3. School administrators should employ the services of guidance and counselors. The guidance and counselors should help to rebuild confidence in students and this will make them become resilient from their inability to concentrate on their academic activities.

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