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Principals' Perceptions of Student Performance on the Nigerian Senior Secondary Certificate Examination

Comfort Fubara Oghu
Walden University

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Comfort Oghu

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Review Committee

Dr. Celeste Stansberry, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Asoka Jayasena, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Estelle Jorgensen, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University

2016

Abstract

Principals' Perceptions of Student Performance on the Nigerian Senior Secondary

Certificate Examination

by

Comfort Oghu Fubara

MEd, University of Port Harcourt, 2005

BEd, University of Port Harcourt, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Leadership, Policy, and Change in Education

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Abstract

Failure of high school students on the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) in Nigeria is severely limiting the number of students qualified to enroll in college. The purpose of this multiple case study of 6 high schools in southern Nigeria was to describe principals' perceptions of student performance on the SSCE and the principals' influence on school climate, teacher expectations and approaches, and student performance. The theories of reasoned action and planned behavior provided the framework for the study. The research questions focused on the extent to which principals developed and sustained a school climate that supported positive outcomes. Qualitative data on principals' perceptions were gathered using semistructured interviews with 48 lead teachers and 6 principals. Data derived from textual transcripts, document reviews, and the results of a cross-case analysis were categorized and developed into themes such as student-related issues, family socio-economic status, and the education system. The results showed students' socio-economic challenges and principals' concerns about the SSCE. Effective principal leadership and positive school climate were essential to enhancing teacher expectations and approaches and were linked to improved student performance in high-performing schools. These findings and implications can inform professional development programs for principals that emphasize a holistic approach, support students' socioeconomic experiences and academic needs, and gather parents' views on best practices. The potential for social change includes improved principal leadership and contributes to higher achievement on the SSCE and increased college enrollment.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the Lord Jesus for His grace that saw me throughout this academic journey. Also, to Pastor Mrs. Ifeoma Chukwuogo, whose educational services in the vineyard of the Lord Jesus are inspiring and a blessing to many.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Between 2009 and 2015, nearly 80% of Nigerian high school students failed the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) that measures their academic readiness for college (West African Examinations Council [WAEC], 2015). According to Ekundayo (2010), high achievement is required not only for college admission but for success in life as well. For that reason, the measure of a Nigerian high school is associated less with its graduation rate, but with the percentage of students who pass the SSCE. Students may graduate from high school if they earn adequate credits, but this examination is the single element that qualifies them for college admission.

In seeking answers for the failures, researchers such as Copland and Michael (2003), Ekundayo (2010), Hallinger, Bickman, and Davis (1996), Hallinger and Heck (1998), and Spillane and James (2001) suggested that a lack of strong school leadership was a major reason. Ubangi (2008) and Valentine and Prater (2011) asserted that principals are the most significant, school-based determinant of school climates, and ultimately, student performance. This assertion directly relates to effective leadership because in the same way teachers inspire students to improve their performance, principals could inspire the greater success of teachers (Bayrak, Altinkurt, & Yilmaz, 2014; Brewer, 1993; Hallinger et al., 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

Effective educational leadership is comprised of elements such as experience, competency, support for effective professional development, and good judgment (Eberts & Stone, 1986; Fallon & Barnett, 2009). Because of the widespread failure of students to

pass the required exit exam in Nigeria, there is a need to understand how, whether, and to what degree the principal affects the school climate and student performance (Bryk et al., 1999; Eberts & Stone, 1986; Garvin et al., 2008; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003; Youngs & King, 2002). The focus of this study, then, is to determine from Nigerian high school principals what they believe are the major causes of the high failure rate.

The WAEC developed the SSCE syllabus and test items based on the national high school curriculum created by the Nigerian Ministry of Education. WAEC officials administer the examination to students in their respective schools during their final year of high school. Students are required to earn credits in mathematics, English language, and three other subjects that are relevant to their anticipated college programs, but earning credit does not ensure they have learned enough to pass the SSCE. Students who fail it must retake the test until they pass if they are to be admitted to college (WAEC, 2013).

According to the National Policy of Education (2004), all high schools in Nigeria are required to build their curriculum and instruction to help students pass the SSCE and earn a high school certificate. However, fewer than 30% of students either earn enough credits annually in their respective subjects or fail the SSCE (WAEC, 2012). This means that of the students who took the SSCE in 2012, over 1,035,000 could not enter college after graduation (WAEC, 2012). The inability of students to be accepted to college is attributed to either their failure to earn five credits in the subjects required for admission or low scores on the SSCE--or both (Duze, 2011).

Studies of school adequacy, school environment, and learner accomplishments all suggest that a successful educational system depends to a great extent on the nature of the principal's leadership (Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2004). The principal should map out targets that directly influence school climate and instructional delivery to improve student achievement (Lazaridou & Lordanides, 2011). Effective principals also make academic improvement their top priority and seek ways for their students to excel (Clark, Martorell, & Rockoff, 2009). The principal collaboratively establishes school-wide improvement goals (Ubangi, 2008). In addition, principals plan resource allocation, staffing, school buildings, data flow, and the overall administration to determine what should be carried out in the school (Copland & Michael, 2003).

As the school leader, the principal coordinates by directing, assessing, monitoring, and communicating high academic standards (Valentine & Prater, 2011). Principals satisfy this responsibility through formative leadership and summative assessments that require them to regularly visit classes, gather information concerning instructor performance, and grant legitimacy to their instructional delivery (Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2004). As stated by Valenti (2010), the principal's leadership is perceived as the vital component to executing any school change.

The principal can solve some problems by using assessments to measure levels of goal attainment and can make data-driven decisions to improve instructional practices (Bryk et al., 1999; Eberts & Stone, 1986; Garvin et al., 2008; Hamilton et al., 2009; Lane, Kalberg, Mofield, Wehby, & Parks, 2009). Principals are accountable for both the

success and failure of the school because it is the principal's responsibility to direct the education of all students (Brown, Finch, MacGregor, & Watson, 2012). An ineffective principal can be detrimental because when the school has low test scores and a decline in other measures of effectiveness, student aspirations may become thwarted. Although students are themselves responsible for their test scores, if the principal does not give clear direction to the focus of the school, the efforts of the teachers, and the expectations for students, he or she is not accepting responsibility for his or her educational leadership. In particular, when accepting the usual connection between higher socioeconomic level and greater academic achievement, if many students in a fairly affluent region are failing the test in large numbers, the source of the problem likely lies within the school.

The actions of principals are said to have a direct relationship to the academic climate of an educational institution (Urlick & Bowers, 2011). More specifically, principal's perceptions of support from the central office and the requirement to follow its orders directly impact the academic climate (Urlick & Bowers, 2011). Moreover, principals' perceptions of their ability to effect change and improvement (e.g., self-efficacy) in schools that do not meet annual yearly progress has direct effects on the leadership behavior (transformational vs. transactional) they display toward subordinates (Daly, Der-Martirosian, Ong-Dean, Park, & Wishard-Guerra, 2011).

In relation to the students, these leadership styles have a direct influence on teacher performance. Conchie (2013) demonstrated a correlation between employee behavior and transformational leadership. Specifically, employees who had trusting

relations with their leaders were more readily motivated and performed well. On the other hand, Leary, Green, Denson, Schoenfeld, and Henley (2013) found the opposite to be true: Employees who had dysfunctional leaders experienced poor engagement, poor job satisfaction, and burnout. Negative behavior from leadership was found to result in negative behavior from employees as well as employees' unwillingness to work if they were treated in a harsh or negative manner (Fleishman, 1998). It was also found that transformational leadership positively affected teachers' efficacy (Kurt, Duyar, & Çalik, 2011). Other research has showed a link between teacher efficacy and student achievement in such a way that suggests greater efficacy leads to greater effort and persistence, and, therefore, greater success (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Hence, there is a need to understand the perceptions of principals because they are strong predictors of the manner leadership is manifested in the school, which in turn determines whether students learn. If a principal perceives there is a problem in the school and with its members, the principal should act appropriately to address it; otherwise, it is very unlikely that it will be solved (Valentine & Prater, 2011).

The absence of direct connectivity between leadership and student performance suggests the need for understanding principals' perceptions of student performance on the SSCE. Because of that need, this multiple case study describes principals' perceptions of student performance on the SSCE and their influence on school climate, teacher expectations, and instructional approaches as their schools prepare students for the exam. Using qualitative data gathered from interviews with principals and teachers and a review

of school-related documents, I sought to learn the causes that high school principals attribute to student failure on the SSCE, the significance they place on the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement, and how they influence school climate and teacher expectations. The research site was a large city in southern Nigeria in which nearly 50% of students each year either fail to earn adequate credits to graduate or fail the exam.

Because the primary problem of the high school students focused on in this study was poor performance on the SSCE, I investigated principals' perceptions in relation to their efforts to enhance the effectiveness of their schools to maintain a high level of performance and to learn their perceptions about poor student performance on the SSCE (Ekundayo, 2010). It was evident from the data in my study that the principal's leadership role in high school merits study. In this chapter, I will provide the background of the study, the problem statement, purpose of the study, the research questions, and the theoretical foundation. In addition, I will explain the nature of the study and present the definitions of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance of this study, and a summary.

Background of the Study

In light of the global need for a better-prepared labor force, demand for greater access to higher levels of education is growing dramatically (World Bank, 2013). To achieve that demand, Nigerian schools want their students to pass the SSCE and to attend university. In most cases, principals are in charge of their institutions and directly influence the behavior and performance of teachers (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Because school

principals are responsible for initiating policies and reforms based on what they perceive to be needed in their schools, they also strongly influence the success of students in their schools (Bayrak et al., 2014; Brewer, 1993; Copland & Michael, 2003; Eyal & Roth, 2011; Oyedeji & Fasasi, 2006; Peters & Pearce, 2012; Valentine & Prater, 2011).

Principals' leadership styles and decisions also influence the performance of students; however, this effect may be indirect (Brooks, Adams, & Morita-Mullaney, 2010; Kythreotis, Pashiardis, & Kyriakides, 2010). Brooks et al. (2010) showed that principals who saw the need for improved programs for English language learners were able to provide the needed resources for students; however, teachers are still the ones who carry out the interventions and directly teach, and students are in turn expected to perform better because of the resources. Additionally, researchers have noted that the accuracy of the perceptions and awareness of principals regarding the actual needs of teachers and students is essential to improving the performance of both groups (Brooks et al., 2010; Kythreotis et al., 2010).

In Nigeria, the role of principals is essential to the improved performance of their schools, teachers, and students (Ekundayo, 2010; Maduabum, 2002; Ojo, 1999; Ubangi, 2008; Uyanga, 2007). The country has experienced considerable educational change since 1995. Although the population increased from 45.2 million in 1960 to 166.2 million in 2012, the immediate past president, Goodluck Jonathan, was more successful than his predecessors in the attempt to improve education, as he established nine new colleges and 64 high schools to accommodate the growing student population (Ministry of Education,

2013). The Nigerian government has a goal of eradicating ignorance, illiteracy, and poverty in a country with education funding concerns and political challenges (Universal Basic Education, 2014). The current low passing rate on the SSCE affects the economy of Nigeria because it signals a failure to produce adequate human capital to support all sectors of society (Emiloju & Adeyoju, 2012).

Although learning and test scores are not the only measures of success, the relevance of student performance has caught the attention of the government, parents, education boards, and legislators (Nigerian Education Research and Development Council [NERDC], 2008). As a high school principal, I know that parents are concerned about their children's academic performance because positive results are believed to provide more career options and job security, while poor performance signals the opposite. State and federal boards of education in Nigeria are charged with the responsibility for ensuring improved performance (NERDC, 2011). Schools, in turn, are expected to improve the academic achievement of its students and are driven to do so because student performance affects a school's reputation.

Success in state-run educational institutions is measured by academic performance based on standards set by both the government and the institution (NERDC, 2008). Educational evaluation in Nigeria is the responsibility of WAEC, which plans, develops, and evaluates the SSCE syllabus for high schools (NERDC, 2008). Principals implement the SSCE syllabus in their respective schools through teachers' instructional

activities (WAEC, 2013). During the final year of high school, WAEC organizes summative assessments for students and determines the grades they earn (WAEC, 2013).

School effectiveness is measured by the extent to which the objectives of a school program are achieved. According to Awwalu and Yusof (2012), the parameters for measuring the effectiveness of a school principal include the school climate, teacher performance, and the number of students who earn credits in SSCE. The Wallace Foundation (2013) has documented effective practices for instructional leadership expectations. According to the Wallace Foundation research, principals are expected to ensure effective learning for all students. In Nigeria, at the head of every high school is the principal, the chief executive who is ultimately responsible for all that happens within the school (Oyedeji & Fasasi, 2006). As the chief executive, the principal allocates school duties and responsibilities. Despite this important role, there are inconsistencies in the available literature concerning the perceptions of principals whose schools are working to prepare students for the SSCE. In addition, there is little available qualitative research on this topic (Alabi, 2008; Alaka & Obadara, 2013; Fabunmi, Brai-Abu, & Adenigji, 2007; Muhammed & Akanle, 2008).

For over two decades, reform proposals in many countries have suggested the importance of effective principal leadership. In the 1990s, efforts to promote student achievement often included effective leadership, although investigations reported weak implementation (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Recent policy discussions in the United States and other countries suggest an increasing emphasis on effective principal leadership.

These discussions are supported by research, suggesting that effective principal leadership in schools has the potential for significant positive effects on student achievement (Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens, & Slegers, 2012; Coelli & Green, 2012; Valentine & Prater, 2011). Coelli and Green (2012) evaluated the effects of individual high school principals on graduation rates and English exam scores of Grade 12 students in British Columbia, Canada, and found that the principal could affect Grade 12 English test scores and graduation rates over time through the guidance and leadership manifested and the emphasis placed upon academic achievement.

Although principals can affect both English test scores and graduation rates, the impact is more apparent on English test scores. Coelli and Green (2012) specifically found that graduation rates might increase by as much as 2.6 percentage points, roughly one-third of the standard deviation across different high schools. They further found that a principal's impact on English test scores and graduation rates are not immediate but develop over time. For that reason, high principal turnover can have a negative effect on not only English test scores, but the overall climate of the school:

When we allow for the possibility that it takes time for principals to have their full effect on a school, we find that individual principals can have substantial impacts on both outcomes [English test scores and graduation rates] if given enough time at a school to make their mark. (Coelli & Green, 2012, p. 107)

In particular, Coelli and Green (2012) found that principals could positively affect both English test scores and graduation rates for 58.8% of students' Grade 12 English

scores if they had led their schools for over 6 years. Conversely, there was no positive effect from principals who had been in the position for fewer than 6 years. The researchers considered this finding as among the strongest evidence of the effects of administrators on student learning.

Sebastian and Allensworth (2012) also evaluated the effects of principal leadership in Chicago in the United States. Instead of studying graduation rates and test scores, they focused on how the school leader affected classroom instruction and student achievement through key organizational factors such as professional capacity, parent-community ties, and the school's learning climate. The researchers determined ways leadership could account for the variances in achievement and instruction between schools and differences in instruction among teachers within each school they studied. Using multilevel structural equation modeling to evaluate the relationships among principal leadership, school organizational structures, classroom instruction, student grades, and test gains on the American College Test (ACT) Education Planning and Assessment System, Sebastian and Allensworth found that principal leadership could indeed affect classroom instruction. They measured principal leadership and school organizational structures based on the responses from teachers in the Chicago Public Schools during the 2006–2007 school year and found that within schools, differences in classroom instruction are linked to principal's leadership through different pathways. The strongest pathway is the quality of professional development and program coherence, meaning that if principals improve the quality of professional development and the

coherence of their programs, these can, in turn, positively affect student achievement (Sebastian & Allensworth). Between schools, however, differences in instruction and student achievement are linked with principal leadership only through the learning climate (Sebastian & Allensworth). This finding suggests that in high schools, the most important role of the principal is to establish and support a consistent, student achievement-focused climate to improve school-wide achievement (Sebastian & Allensworth).

As educational leaders, principals may improve their reputations among stakeholders by employing new knowledge, leveraging current strategies, and implementing best practices (Blaik Hourani & Stringer, 2014; Hamid, 2008; Tirozzi & George, 2001). Since federal and state education laws require schools to focus on improving student performance, principals should use existing best practices and develop strategies to apply knowledge from research to help improve their schools' efficacy (Hornig & Loeb, 2010; Jacob & Lefgren, 2005), as effective principal leadership should positively affect teacher performance in ways that improve student learning.

According to Ekundayo (2010), principals can see themselves as change agents. School principals act as planners, coordinators, and problem solvers in educational institutions because learning and instructional activities move more smoothly if schools have the support of their leaders. Moreover, with such support at the building level, change can happen in an instructional framework rapidly, but when the leader does not

perform his or her role appropriately or adequately, needed changes will take longer than they should (Valentine & Prater, 2011).

Witziers and Bob (2003) analyzed the correlation of identity and scholarly results of British learners in large urban areas. They considered the role that different social, interpersonal, and institutional structures play in the instructional atmosphere and determined that principals need to support educators through professional development to effectively handle the differences between the learner's background and school experiences. Their reason was that the principal has an effect on learner accomplishment.

A public education system is subject to many layers of social and governmental frameworks that affect it in different ways, and a school board must consider these dynamics. Schools, in turn, are expected to be ethical entities that promote positive relationships among instructors, principals, parents, and students (NERDC, 2011). As the school leader, the principal must follow the laws and regulations in addition to following local community customs and values (Hallinger, 2005). At the same time, the principal must be focused on maintaining the best possible environment for student learning. These factors illustrate the complexity of the role of the educational leader of a school.

Nigerian principals' perceptions of the reasons for the high failure rate on the SSCE are important to understanding the kind of school climate that promotes success. According to Alaka and Obadara (2013), principals can ascertain their students' levels of readiness to sit for and pass the SSCE by considering their performance on formative assessments and the school-based mock examination that is a replica of the SSCE.

Despite the influence of the principal's perceptions of the school climate and teacher expectations and approaches as their schools prepare students for the SSCE, there is limited research in this field, a gap in literature that I identified in this study. Hence, there was a need to understand the perceptions of principals, which is a strong predictor of the manner by which leadership is enacted in a school. This leadership, in turn, determines whether students learn enough to demonstrate the content mastery they are expected to exhibit, particularly on exit examinations.

Lack of research about the principals' influence on school climate and teachers' expectations as their students prepare for the SSCE provided me with an opportunity to investigate how leadership perceptions may be built and effectively managed. In addition, the findings from this study may help principals to identify the activities and understand their roles in enabling schools to achieve desired academic outcomes. In this study, I learned principals' perceptions of their influence on school climate and teacher expectations of student performance on the SSCE by interviewing six principals and 48 lead teachers in schools who have been administering the SSCE for a minimum of 3 years.

While positive principal leadership benefits overall school performance (Bruggencate et al., 2012; Dornyei & Zoltan, 2007; Dunn & Rita, 2009; Nidus & Sadder, 2011; Valentine & Prater, 2011), it was not known how to use principals' perceptions to enhance school climate, teachers' approaches, and ultimately, student performance. Consequently, there was a need to determine whether principals' perceptions may be

consistently applied throughout all the different processes that are related to student performance on the SSCE. The results of this study will partly fill that gap, as the findings can be used both to enlighten principals about their effect on school climate and student performance as well as how principals' perceptions can influence student academic performance, particularly on the SSCE.

Problem Statement

Student performance on the SSCE in Nigeria compares unfavorably with performance in the five member countries of the WAEC (Belo-Osagie, 2015). Although many factors influence student achievement, researchers have consistently identified a principal's leadership as a major part of all school outcomes--whether positive or negative (Bruggencate et al., 2012; Dunn & Rita, 2009; Nidus & Sadler, 2011; Valentine & Prater, 2011). The general problem was that the current low passing rate on the SSCE is of major concern because Nigeria needs to develop adequate human capital to support all sectors of the national economy (Emiloju & Adeyoju, 2012). Students who fail to achieve their aspirations after high school because of poor academic performance or other reasons are more likely to engage in criminal activities and use illegal drugs (Kearns, 2011). The personal and societal costs of low achievement call for a reflective and focused approach to reaching desired student outcomes (Abdullahi & Onasanya, 2010).

The continuing increase of using standardized testing as a measure of student achievement has drawn attention to the continuing poor performance of students in Nigeria that diminishes both students' self-confidence and their post high school

opportunities (Emiloju & Adeyoju, 2012). In 2008, only 14% of students had passing marks in English, mathematics, and three other subjects (Ekundayo, 2010). The 2014 SSCE result analysis recorded over 1,163,000 students as having failed of the 1,692,375 who sat for the examination--a 69% failure rate (WAEC, 2014). Failure to pass the test has prevented many students from enrolling in college and suggests the need to improve the quality of high school education as well as test preparation in Nigeria. The importance of the school principal in leading the school to overcoming barriers that prevent increased student achievement is the focus of this study.

The demand for higher education is growing dramatically because globalization has heightened the need for a better-prepared and better-educated professional and labor force, and the ability of high schools to successfully support the transit of adolescents to college is more important than ever before (World Bank, 2013). According to Conchie (2013), strong principal leadership is identified as one of the most important determinants of positive educational outcomes. However, the specific problem is that despite the important role of the principal as the school leader, there is no available research on principals' perceptions of how their leadership might affect the school climate, the expectations of teachers, and student achievement.

The increased emphasis on principal accountability and the need to close the achievement gap have also put more emphasis on leadership practices (Abedi, 2004). Hence, a principal should be fully involved in the school. The focus of this study was to determine how principals develop and sustain a school climate that supports teachers, and

ultimately, student outcomes, particularly in a district with nearly half of all high school students failing the SSCE.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multiple case study was to describe principals' perceptions of student performance on the SSCE and their influence on school climate and teacher expectations and approaches. For this case study, I used the constructivist paradigm to describe the reasons Nigerian high school principals give for student failure on the SSCE. A constructivist paradigm was used because it allowed for focusing on and exploring the ways people learn, which I believed would be central to this study. To do this, I studied the reasons high school principals attributed to student failure on the SSCE, the significance they placed on the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement, and the extent to which they developed and sustained a supportive academic climate. I reviewed documents such as school logbooks, policy statements, announcements, and minutes of meetings in each project school. Such information enhanced my understanding of what principals value and the way they wanted to lead.

The success of high school principals can be measured in part by student achievement on the SSCE and the number of students who are admitted to college (Valentine & Prater, 2011). The current U.S. interest for expanded school accountability to raise student achievement has included emphasis on school leaders to view themselves as not only the administrative leaders of their schools, but perhaps more importantly, the instructional leader (Turner, 2013). This study adds to the scholarly literature by assisting

in understanding how principals' perceptions of their roles that affect their behavior can also improve school climate, support teachers, and ultimately affect student outcomes.

Research Questions

According to Maxwell (2013), research questions (RQs) focus on and communicate the goals of a study. The following RQs were used to lead to a better understanding of how high school principals perceive their roles:

RQ1: What reasons do Nigerian high school principals attribute to student failure on the SSCE?

RQ2: What significance do Nigerian high school principals place on the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement?

RQ3: How do Nigerian high school principals influence school climate and teacher expectations and approaches as their schools prepare students for the SSCE?

Theoretical Foundation

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) and the theory of planned behavior (TPB) were the theoretical lenses through which I examined principals' behavior and their perceptions of their roles. The TRA was originally introduced into the field of social psychology (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). TRA proposes that individual behavior is influenced by behavioral intentions, which are a function of an individual's attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms surrounding the performance of the behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Underpinning this theory is the belief that an individual's behavior is determined by the intention to perform the behavior and that this intention is,

in turn, a function of his or her attitude toward the behavior and his or her subjective norms (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

In line with TRA, the TPB provided the framework for understanding the perceptions of principals on how to improve the scores of students on the SSCE (Ajzen, 1991). TPB, a theory of Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), is an extension of the TRA. The premise of the TPB is that behavior can be deliberative, planned, and based on one's beliefs (Ajzen & Fishbein). Moreover, there are three kinds of human beliefs: behavioral, normative, and control (Ajzen, 2011). The TPB provides an integrated approach to determining perceptions of a target behavior, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and can predict perceptions of the relationship between behavioral intentions and actual behavior (Ajzen).

The TRA (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and the TPB (Ajzen, 1985) are theories that explain behavior as making a logical choice to perform or not to perform an action. Choice in this regard is seen as a function of the individual's attitude toward an action and/or the person's perceived sense of social support for a given behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein). Although both theories are identical in their suppositions, the TPB takes into account the extent to which the behavior under consideration is under volitional control (Ajzen & Fishbein). As a result, theorists consider TRA more useful for understanding volitional behaviors, while the TPB is used for understanding less volitional behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1985). Coren (2006), Jacobs-Pollez, (2012), and Fishbein and Ajzen suggested that intentions to

participate in activities could be predicted based upon knowledge, observation, or other information about an issue. Coren purported that individuals who already have a positive attitude about a subject or situation tend to evaluate them positively. Therefore, a Nigerian Principal's intent to support or become actively involved in improving student performance on the SSCE may be predicted by analyzing his or her beliefs about the relevance of that program (Jacobs-Pollez).

I used the independent variables of the study: *attitude*, *subjective norms*, and *perceived difficulties* of TPB to determine behaviors that are voluntary or required (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). As such, TPB could be used to examine a principal's perceptions of the academic performance of students on the SSCE, their perceptions of the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement (subjective), and the nature of the school climate and teacher expectations approaches (perceived difficulties). In relation to this study, TRA was used to link leaders and school climate as a resource for increased school performance as well as to critique data to glean meaning and understanding of the principals' perceptions of student performance. These concepts will be more fully discussed in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The research design of this study was a qualitative framework within which I used a multiple case study approach to investigate principals' perceptions of student performance on the SSCE and their own influence on school climate and teacher expectations and approaches as students prepare for the exam. Purposeful sampling was

used to identify six high school principals with 3 or more years of SSCE administration experience in their current schools. Two principals were selected from each school type (private, state, and federal). Three had a record of 80% passing on the SSCE, and three had had consistent failure. I selected eight lead teachers from schools whose principals agreed to participate in the study for focus group interviews. These selection criteria were used to ensure that the principals and lead teachers were knowledgeable and established in their schools.

Merriam (1998) defined qualitative research as a means for examining and appreciating the significance that individuals or groups attribute to issues. Therefore, qualitative methodology was appropriate for use in this study. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), a case study is the best design for educational and social research. Case studies permit explanation, which typically generates rich information based on the perception of participants from a specific social group (Yin, 2011). The qualitative research approach enabled me to effectively explore and provide a comprehensive account from the viewpoints of participants and present findings that were realistic to educators (Singleton & Straits, 2005; Yin, 2009).

In addition, a research design is strengthened when multiple data collection methods are employed because it allows a researcher to explore the differences between the cases and enable learning and understanding from multiple sources (Yin, 2009). The data for this study included face-to-face interviews with the six principals and focus group interviews with lead teachers at each school. In addition, I reviewed relevant

school documents such as policy statements, logbooks, announcements, minutes of meetings, and each school's organizational chart. Data were analyzed using Yin's (2011) cross-case synthesis technique, while Atlas.ti software aided the analysis. I employed triangulation of data, member checking, detailed descriptions, and an acknowledgement of potential researcher bias to increase objectivity, validity, and trustworthiness, and support data accuracy.

Definitions of Terms

The following are definitions of some of the key terms as they were used in the study:

Assessment: The practice of gathering and documenting data about achievement, skills, and abilities of a group--in this case, students (Popham, 2010).

Behavior and intentions: These concepts are supported by the TPB (Ajzen, 1991) and here refer to how schools prepare students for the SSCE and the significance they place on the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement.

Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE): An educational examination requirement in Nigeria, usually taken by students who are between the ages of 15 and 17, and used as a means to determine whether they are qualified for and prepared to enter college (Ministry of Education, 2013).

West African Examinations Council (WAEC): The body that conducts the annual SSCE for final-year high school students (both public and private) in May and June and

for those students not enrolled in regular schools in November and December (WAEC, 2013).

Assumptions

For the purposes of this study, I assumed that principals who participated could contribute meaningfully to understanding how principals in general view student performance on the SSCE. This assumption was based on my using the criterion sampling strategy of selecting only experienced principals to participate, as experienced participants can increase understanding of a case (Patton 2002). I also assumed that participants provided honest responses to the interview questions since they and the teachers were mature adults who voluntarily participated and had a vested interest in learning from the results. For the latter reason, participants' responses were considered their honest understanding of and truthful responses to the questions. Another assumption I made was that principals are actively working to ensure their students are preparing for the examination. This assumption was based on the premise that students' academic success is one of a principals' primary responsibilities and that schools are judged by the number of students who pass the exam. I also assumed that principals understand the examination criteria and want to enhance student performance, an assumption based on the fact that principals in the study were selected using the criterion sampling strategy to include only those with SSCE administration experience. Finally, it was assumed that principals knew stakeholders who could support their decisions and actions on how to improve school climate, teaching approaches, and student performance.

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to learn and describe principals' perceptions of student performance on the SSCE and the effect their perceptions have on school climate, the approaches of teachers, and student performance on the exam. In line with this purpose, the scope of exploration in this study was the dynamic of the recurrent student failure on the SSCE based on the perceptions of principals. Although many factors influence student achievement on the SSCE, researchers have identified the principal's leadership as essential for achieving overall positive school outcomes (Bruggencate et al., 2012; Dunn & Rita, 2009; Nidus & Sadder, 2011; Valentine & Prater, 2011). No phenomena outside the scope of the study were explored. Social groups or populations other than the ones mentioned in this study were not considered. The study did not include the exploration of perceptions and roles of any other member of the educational institutions apart from the principals and lead teachers.

Although the study covered an entire large city in southern Nigeria, only six principals in private, public, or federal government high schools approved to register and prepare students for the SSCE were selected to participate. I used the multiple case study approach, multiples sources of data, rich and thick descriptions, member checking, and cross-case synthesis to confirm results and improve robustness (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1987; Yin, 2009). The selected principals had 3 or more years of SSCE administration experience in their current schools. Three schools were selected that have a record of 80% students passing the SSCE, and three schools were selected that have experienced

consistent student failure to pass the exam in acceptable numbers. The specific experiences, knowledge, skills, and exposure of individual participants most likely contributed appropriate data, in terms of both relevance and depth. I know the subject under study well, as I am a Nigerian high school principal. Therefore, I employed self-awareness to address any potential for bias when collecting and analyzing data (Nachmias & Nachmias).

The scope of this multiple case study was defined by the TPB. The unit of analysis was the experience of principals with the SSCE. Given the content of this research and the uniformity of the SSCE structure in Nigeria, it would be appropriate for researchers to test the results in other states in Nigeria. I will discuss the transferability of results, research methods, context of method application, sample demographics or description, data collection process, and data analysis processes in detail later in the study to make comparisons or applications to another social group easier.

Limitations

This qualitative case study was limited to the six high school principals in a large city in the southern part of Nigeria who knew and understood the administration of the SSCE. The research was limited to this area because it had over 50% poor performance on the SSCE, despite its location in the affluent Niger Delta region. Although limited to schools in one region, transferability across other parts of the country is possible because of the uniformity of laws and curricula across states. To maintain conceptual clarity, I limited my conception of leadership to the principal. This is a limitation of this study; by

focusing on only principal leadership, I did not include other important forms of leadership such as distributed and shared leadership (Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Spillane, Camburn, & Pareja, 2007; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).

Another limitation of the study was that given its context, the data gathering and analysis could have been subject to personal biases. Because the study data were collected from human beings, it is probable that participants had personal biases that may have influenced their answers (Bansal & Corley, 2011). In recognition of this limitation, I reminded participants to answer as accurately as they could. Moreover, data saturation was the basis for making sure that the sample produced similar and abundant answers. In addition, another limitation was that personal biases might have come from me as the analyst (Bansal & Corley, 2011). To control for this limitation, I acknowledged my expectations regarding the outcome and findings of the study and was deliberate about looking for personal beliefs in my interpretations and conclusions that lacked support from the data.

Significance of the Study

Understanding principals' perceptions of student performance on the SSCE is significant for several reasons. One is that the findings may provide a greater understanding of new strategies that might improve students' SSCE scores and lead to more students enrolling in college. School administrators and researchers could use the findings to enrich teachers' professional practice and improve the school climate because effective school leadership can improve school efficiency (Sebastian & Allensworth,

2012). The principles of the TPB can also be applied to principals' professional development because TPB can improve principals' efficiency when used to align best practices (Coren, 2006). A description of the importance a high school principal places on the SSCE might be a factor contributing to student achievement and might help educators make decisions about creating a school climate that better supports achievement (Olaleye & Oluremi, 2013). Furthermore, the findings of this study may advance knowledge of school leadership by creating principals' awareness of their influence on student achievement. Application of the findings may help high school principals to create and maintain positive school climates that lead to academic success and to become more proactive about raising achievement.

Principals are directly affected by the publication of the results of their student performance. In the United States, principals are also on the front lines of public schools since the enactment of NCLB (Wallace Foundation, 2013). The importance of this examination might be relevant to other nations who are also concerned with the poor achievement of their high school students.

Several researchers, including Alaka and Obadara (2013), studied the performance of students on the SSCE in Nigeria and noted that the principal's leadership affects the quality of classroom instruction, degree of student achievement, and overall school functioning. Ekundayo (2010) studied the administration of secondary schools in Nigeria and concluded that although principals must attend to certain managerial responsibilities, they should ensure they lead efficient schools. Therefore, if the goal of

educators is to have effective schools, then principals should make instructional leadership a top priority (Oyedeji & Fasasi, 2006). Learning the perceptions of principals regarding the preparation of students taking the SSCE in Nigeria will contribute to closing the research gap on this aspect of principal leadership. This understanding should help educators as they continue to work towards creating a more effective educational climate.

Finally, this study is significant because of its potential for stimulating positive social change through the experiences of educational leaders. School administrators could use this information to help improve how they manage school climate and teacher professional development programs. Additionally, the results of this research may lead to a redesign of principals' professional development programs to make accommodations for more supportive school climates. Professional development personnel may also have access to additional research-based evidence that can be used for training.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to determine what high school principals believe causes student failure on the SSCE, the significance they place on the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement, how their behaviors and actions are reflected in their expressed commitments, and how they develop and sustain a school climate that supports teacher and student outcomes on the SSCE. As research literature has identified this as a problem in the West, studying the problem in Nigeria may also add to the understanding of a problem that may be evident in other countries. TPB provided the framework for

describing the perceptions of principals on how to help teachers more effectively prepare students for the SSCE (Ajzen, 1991).

In this qualitative case study, I examined what six high school principals in Nigeria believed has contributed most significantly to the problem of student failure. A case study approach was selected because it helped me to explore and obtain detailed information for a clearer perspective of the phenomenon. There is no specific research literature on how Nigerian principals influence their school's learning climate as their schools prepare students for the SSCE at the study site. In Chapter 2 of this research study, I will present the review of related literature on SSCE and principals' roles in the academic performance of students. Moreover, the literature review in Chapter 2 will include the factors that relate to the assessment of educational objectives and tests and measures as well as the cultural underpinnings of assessments.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this study, I explored what high school principals in a large city in southern Nigeria believe causes failure on the SSCE, the significance they place on the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement, and their beliefs about what influences school climate and teacher expectations and approaches as their schools prepare students for the exam. In the following literature review, I consulted the available extant literature to learn aspects of the problem that are relevant to the topic. These aspects included the theoretical foundation, a principal's influence on school climate, the impact of school climate on teachers' approaches and expectations, and school climate and student achievement. The chapter will also include an overview of the international perceptions of the roles of high school principals, Nigerian high school principals' challenges and competencies, and high school curriculum frameworks. In addition, I will discuss current legislation and its impact on leadership and student achievement, the effects of curriculum reforms on principals in Nigeria, assessment as a tool for measuring learning, success on the SSCE, and factors affecting student performance on the SSCE.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted multiple database searches to determine potentially relevant sources for the literature using search tools provided by online databases such as ERIC, Education Research Complete, Education from Sage, Education Research Starters, Oxford Education Bibliographies. Multidisciplinary databases accessed included ProQuest Central, Academic Search Complete, and PsycINFO. The keywords I used in

the searches were as follows: *secondary education, high school principals' perceptions, student academic achievement, public examination, high school assessment, West African Senior Examination Council, effective school variables, Senior School Certificate Examination, and theory of planned behavior.*

Theoretical Foundation

The TPB and TRA were the theoretical foundation I used to support this study. TPB is an extension of TRA (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Many studies related to education have used TPB as a framework for learning principals' beliefs about the inclusion of students with autism and their management intentions to promote diversity (Andrews, 2012; Hall, 2012; Landeck, 2006). The TPB was considered a practical theoretical framework for this study because empirical data support the effectiveness of TPB in explaining and predicting a variety of human behaviors (Tucker, 2013; Vagias, 2009).

TRA suggests that individual behavior is propelled by behavioral intentions that stem from individual attitudes toward the behavior and one's subjective norms (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Attitudes are ascertained by assessing the beliefs about the consequences of behavior and whether the individual would repeat an act knowing the potential consequences (Ajzen & Fishbein). A subjective norm is the perception of other people's opinions about whether the behavior should or should not be performed (Ajzen & Fishbein). The contribution of the views of others is judged by how much a person feels social pressure to perform a behavior. TRA is concerned with the

control people have over their behaviors, ranging from behaviors that are easily performed to those requiring considerable effort and resources (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Therefore, TRA argues that intention is the mediator explaining the processes by which attitudes and subjective norms influence behavior (see Figure 1).

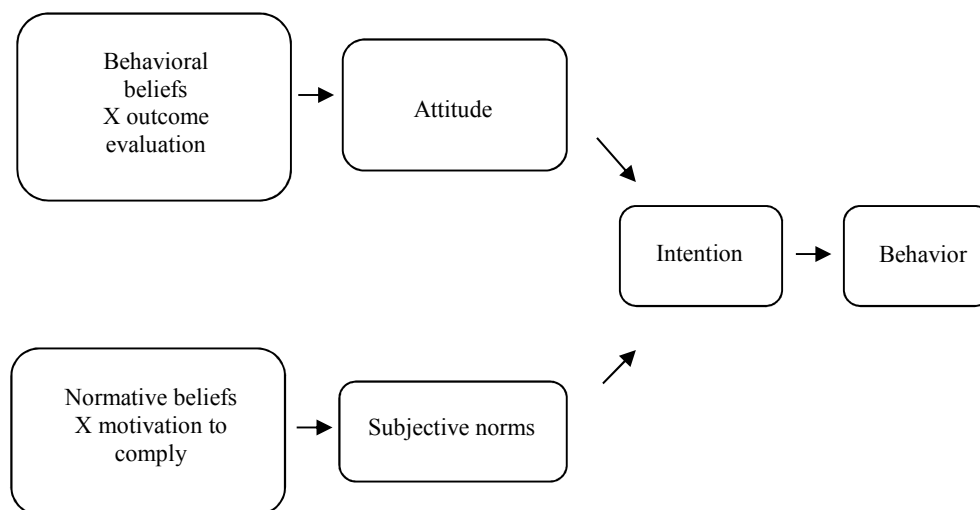


Figure 1. Theory of reasoned action. Adapted from “*Understanding the Attitudes and Predicting Social Behavior,*” by I. Ajzen and M. Fishbein, 1980, p. 12. Copyright 1980 by Pearson.

The TPB, as an extension of the TRA, explains behavior that is not entirely under an individual’s control (Ajzen, 1985). According to Ajzen, behavioral performance is limited by factors such as lack of opportunity or skill or is contingent on the support of others. Perceived control explains an individual’s sense of having the ability and resources to perform a behavior before a plan of action is formed (Ajzen, 1991). However, individuals may differ in their perceptions of control as influenced by locus of control (Ajzen, 1985). According to Rotter (1966), a person with an internal locus of control determines the outcomes that affect his or her behavior, while a person with an

external locus of control feels that outcomes are determined by factors that are external to him or herself. However, Ajzen also suggested situation-specific perceived control as a more precise determinant of a particular behavior than more generalized perceived control measures such as locus of control. Perception of control is based on experience with the behavior and is a reflection of actual control (Ajzen). Therefore, a positive intention to perform a behavior will not be formed if an individual perceives lack of control over performance, irrespective of the favorability of the attitude and subjective norm (Ajzen 1988).

Ajzen (1991) said experiences influence perceived control. Thus, the TPB indirectly accounts for the effect of past behavioral performance on the level of efficacy one feels over future behaviors. For instance, if a principal has tried to introduce new measures and found his or her superior stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education were not supportive, the principal may feel little control over his or her school and may decide against introducing future improvement measures. In contrast, if the attempt had been supported, the principal may believe future improvement measure behaviors will be supported. Therefore, past behaviors may influence perceptions of control over future behaviors and intentions. Although perceived control is thought to be determined by specific control beliefs, I did not address specific control beliefs that were analogous to attitudes and beliefs in this study. Figure 2 represents a model of the theory of planned behavior.

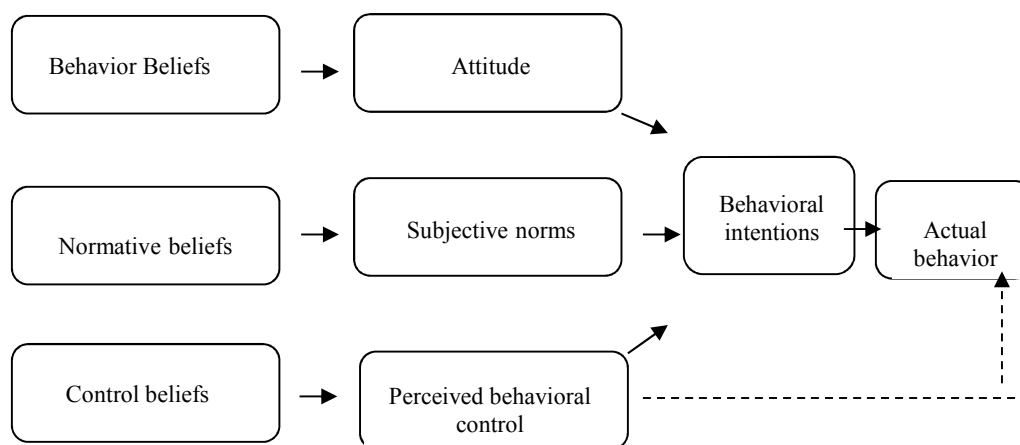


Figure 2. Model of the theory of planned behavior. Adapted from “*Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*,” by I. Ajzen, 1991, p. 182. Copyright 1991 by Academic Press. Inc.

Ajzen (1991) opined that perceiving more control provides the impetus for increased behavioral performance more than does perceiving less control, whether one holds a positive or negative intention (as seen in the theoretical model in Figure 2). A major component of the TPB is an individual’s intention to perform a particular action, intentions that are seen as motivators that influence the action (Ajzen). The stronger the intention to perform an action, the more likely the action will be performed (Ajzen,). However, the individual’s control over the ability to perform the action also plays an important role. Ajzen also argued that the performance of a behavior is a joint function of the intentions and the perceived behavioral control. Three antecedents of intentions are attitudes towards the behaviors, subjective norms related to the behavior, and perceived behavior control (Ajzen). Perceived behavior control could be a result of experiences or anticipated impediments to success in performing the behavior.

To predict an individual's behavior in a particular situation, an understanding of the individual's intentions and perceived behavior control is necessary. Therefore, using the TPB, a principal's intentions to develop and sustain a school climate that supports teachers' expectations and approaches must be coupled with his or her perceived behavior control. The value of TPB in the current study was as the theoretical framing of intentions and perceived behavior control as initial concepts to begin to understand the possible impact of principals' beliefs about the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement and the level of implementation of the action in his or her school.

Research studies have applied TPB to principal's beliefs and the impact of such beliefs on their behaviors in their schools (Begley, 1988; Kane, Sanduetto, & Heath, 2002). Although these studies focused on beliefs and attitudes that align with TPB, they did not include the concept of perceived behavior control. Begley (1988), in a study of 15 principals in one district using interviews to investigate the consequences of school administrators' practices, determined that personal values of principals influenced their responses to the introduction of computers in their schools. Those principals that did not value their potential effectiveness were reluctant to embrace their use and were less effective in implementing the initiative in their schools.

Other studies revealed the use of TPB in administrative support for education (Coren, 2006; Jacobs-Pollez, 2012). Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) suggested that intentions to participate in activities could be predicted based upon knowledge, observations, or other information about an issue. Coren (2006) purported that individuals with positive

attitudes toward a subject or situation tend to evaluate them positively. Therefore, a person's intent to support or become actively involved in a program may be predicted by analyzing his or her beliefs about the relevance of the program (Jacobs-Pollez, 2012).

As applied to this study, the TPB relates to the reasons Nigerian principals gave for student failure on the SSCE in relation to the perceptions of others who can support their decisions on how to improve the examinations (subjective norm) and provide a theoretical base for explaining how RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 relate to the significance Nigerian principals placed on the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement (attitudes) with respect to their locus of control (perceived behavior control) to influence a school climate that supports teachers' expectations and approaches and student outcomes.

A Principal's Influence on School Climate

Research has shown that high school principals have the greatest influence on school achievement through their creation of the school climate and support (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010; DeAngelis & Presley, 2011). According to Brookover et al. (1978), school climate has a larger impact on student achievement than variables such as ethnicity and socio-economic status. The following statements support that assertion:

1. Creating a safe and orderly climate is a strong strategy through which leadership is associated with better classroom instruction and higher student achievement (Kane, Taylor, Tyler, & Wooten, 2010).

2. Even students with highly qualified teachers are unlikely to have high learning gains in schools that are disorderly and unsafe (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011).
3. School climate centers on the feelings teachers and students have about their school and how it affects their behavior (Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002).
4. School climate is directly impacted by the principal's leadership practices (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).
5. The principal can facilitate the development of quality instructional practices by motivating teachers in ways that positively affect student success (Howard et al., 1987; Hoy & Hoy, 2003).
6. Principals are responsible for maintaining a collegial and interactive school climate that supports teachers and students (Calik, Sezgin, Kavgaci, & Cagatay Kilinc, 2012).

Hoy and Hoy (2003) also noted that school climate is dynamic and needs to be monitored and cultivated by the principal, who, as the school leader, is expected to monitor that climate and adjust processes and practices to maintain a healthy and flourishing climate where learning is valued (Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005). When principals engage in processes that support and empower teachers to positively influence instruction, they increase their positive impact on student success (Haynes et al., 1997; Pepper & Thomas, 2002). According to Howard et al. (1987), student academic

success can be linked to the positive actions of the principal on the school climate. The principal of the school is often perceived as being the most important figure and the one who is able to do the most to ensure that educational goals will be achieved (Johnson & Uline, 2005; Lindahl, 2009). Ultimately, when the principal positively impacts the school climate, the effect allows teachers to help bring about positive student academic outcomes (Hoy & Hoy, 2003; Kelly et al., 2005; Norton, 1999; Smith & Piele, 2006). Understanding the perceptions of principals that are related to building and maintaining a positive school climate have the potential to change instructional practices and to improve student performance by affecting teachers' expectations and approaches (Hoy and Hoy). This makes the principal's influence on the school climate and teacher expectations and approaches as their schools prepare students for the SSCE an important factor in school leadership.

Lin (2012) showed that school principals have a high level of capacity to cultivate an environment that contributes positively to teaching and learning. In particular, according to Lin, improved principal leadership is the most important component of the success of any educational reform initiatives and often leads to indirect positive effects on student learning. Lin evaluated actions taken by principals working specifically to cultivate an environment that leads to both effective teaching and learning. In data from 183 high school principals in Taiwan, Lin found that principals could create healthy environments in different ways: personal, organizational, professional, and communal.

More importantly, school principals can facilitate an environment conducive to learning and teaching by establishing respectful and caring learning communities (Lin).

When schools succeed, principals usually get the credit (Dhuey & Smith, 2014; Garrison-Wade, Gonzalez, & Alexander, 2013; Mutch, 2015; Ojera & Yambo, 2014; Taole, 2013). However, when school initiatives fail, or if schools produce poor-quality graduates, the blame should also be placed on principals (Duze, 2012; Jacobson, Johansson, & Day, 2011; Selfi, 2011). As such, the importance of principals in shaping school outcomes cannot be overemphasized. Principals set the tone that drives the teachers in their everyday routines and activities, and, therefore, have a great influence on the learning environment (Garza, Drysdale, Gurr, Jacobson, & Merchant, 2014; Leo, 2015; Lopez, Ahumada, Galdames, & Madrid, 2012). Principals set the school vision and objectives, after which they oversee the implementation of the plans to meet these goals. They are also responsible for outcomes, whether successful or not (Mendels, 2012; Spiro, 2013; Yang, 2014). It is precisely for these reasons that older learning models noted that principals are the key figures behind school success and academic achievement, regardless of whether they have direct contact with students (Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Mendels, 2012; Spiro, 2013; Yang, 2014). If the primary factor for improving student achievement comes through the school's learning climate, then learning how Nigerian principals influence school climate and teacher expectations and approaches as their schools prepare students for the SSCE is essential for improving student performance on

the exam. Figure 3 shows the relationship between principal leadership, school climate, and student achievement.

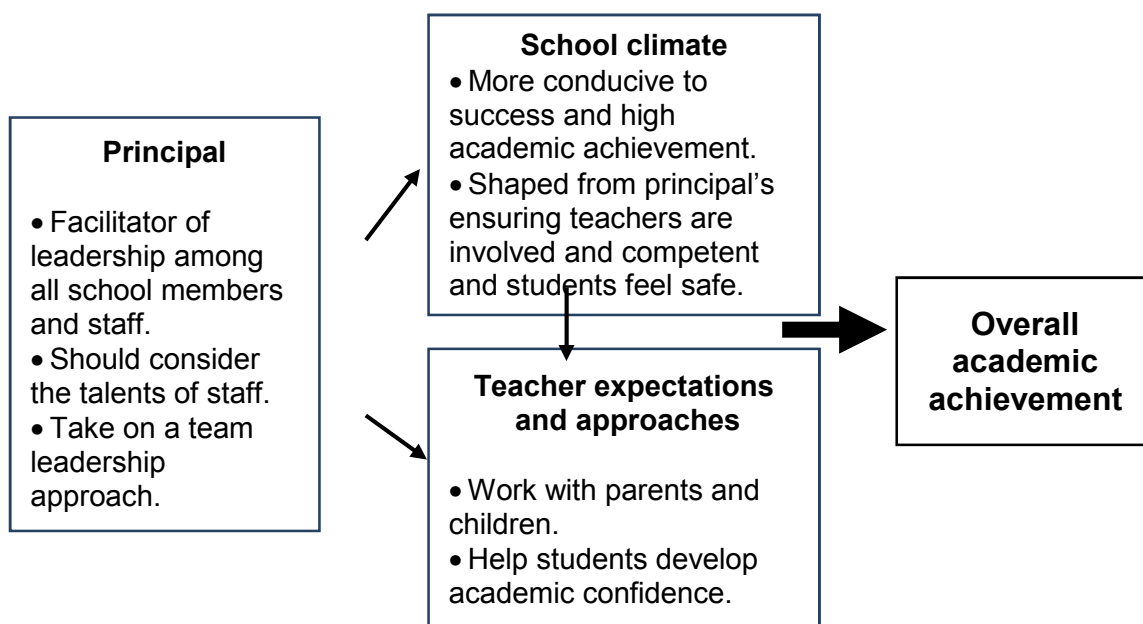


Figure 3. Schematic showing the relationship between the principal's leadership, school climate, teachers' expectations and approaches, and student achievement.

Note. All factors are correlated with each other. The outcome for students is test gains.

Research suggests that even though principals are directly responsible for student success and failure (Algi, Rahman, & Tahir, 2012; Duffy, 2012; Hallinger, 2015; Machin, 2014; Marcellus, Flores, & Craig, 2012; Stringer & Hourani, 2015), their leadership also sets the direction and tone for the values of the school. Hallinger and Heck (1996) stated that the relationship between leadership and student achievement is indirect. Figure 3 above provides a schema that explains the relationships among different variables in relation to the achievement of students. The schema explains how the principal, as the main facilitator of an institution, affects school climate, teacher approaches and expectations, and ultimately student achievement. The principal is an essential

contributor in driving the atmosphere of the school as well as the approaches teachers take in educating their students, given the principal's authority and decision-making role. All variables affect student academic achievement and are discussed in detail in subsequent sections.

Impact of School Climate on Teachers' Approaches and Expectations

O'Donnell and White (2005), in a study on teacher perceptions of their principal's focus on school climate in Pennsylvania middle schools, found a symbiotic relationship between a principal's leadership and student achievement. A positive school climate fosters high standards and differentiated learning that supports individual student's needs so that students can succeed and meet their teachers' expectations (Brookover et al., 1978; Hoy, 1990; Lindahl, 2006; Van Houtte, 2005). In the same vein, Goddard et al. (2000) stated that a positive school climate promotes teachers' expectations of students' achievement and, therefore, prods them to provide instruction that supports that expectation. Teachers who work in schools with positive climates are more enthusiastic, express mutual respect, and develop a sense of community support for each other (Glisson & Green, 2006; Lindahl, 2006; Schein, 1993; Schneider & Hall, 1972). Smith and Piele (2006) asserted that a positive school climate allows teachers to effectively support students' academic needs.

Teachers are expected to exhibit leadership qualities on a variety of levels, beginning first with a demonstrated ability to take the initiative to resolve the difficulties of individual students (Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). However, a

positive climate also influences the way teachers perceive, organize, and deliver instruction as well as set expectations for their students (Hallinger, 2015). Effective leadership helps foster a school climate where learning flourishes and the key intervening variable between leadership and student outcomes is the teacher's work (Stringer & Hourani, 2015). Efforts to improve school climate do not depend only on principals because they do not direct instructional practice in subjects and classrooms. However, they can create a climate that enables teachers to be successful (Machin, 2014).

Organizational studies show that in all organizations, each member must be aware of his or her role and place within the structure (Hoy & Hannum, 1997). Each member must also be given the chance to define his or her role and place. In an academic setting, the traditional notion is that roles are predefined (Addi-Racah, 2015; Tutkun & Aksoyalp, 2012). These roles are based on a hierarchical, authoritarian model, in which teachers are considered the followers of their principals, who are, in turn, perceived to be subordinate to their superintendents (Addi-Racah, 2015; Tutkun & Aksoyalp, 2012). Under this traditional structure, those below the hierarchy merely adhere to those above them, no matter what their whims and decisions are. As such, those below the chain would not have the chance for self-determination, and therefore lack the power and opportunity to contribute to the overall structure of the organization. Mandates are merely passed from the top down, and those below just follow these mandates. This model of school leadership thrived during the 1990s (Ahmad & Ghavifekr, 2014; Tutkun & Aksoyalp, 2012). However, one significant problem of this approach is that a policy or

mandate created by leaders and passed on to teachers rarely stays the same and rarely achieves what the policy was originally intended for. By the time a new policy makes its way into the classroom, it has probably changed markedly from the original concept and intention. This kind of structure leads to an inefficient system and can sometimes waste school resources or talent (Ahmad & Ghavifekr, 2014; Tutkun & Aksoyalp, 2012). This top-down approach is prevalent in Nigerian high schools, and a better understanding of the perceptions of principals is needed to help mitigate the problem.

A considerable range of areas can be affected by teacher attention to student needs. Teachers can direct other teachers toward greater community outreach and toward tackling the increasingly complex familial, social, and community issues that bedevil many of today's students and schools (Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004). In addition, teacher approaches to the subjects they teach and how those subjects affect their students and the communities in which they live can have a significant impact on the ability of those same students to learn what is required of them. Teachers are the change agents paving the way for educational reform, and teacher beliefs are precursors to change (Duran & Duran, 2005). If a child does not comprehend how a subject might be useful personally, it may become more difficult for him or her to learn it. Teachers who feel they are merely carrying out the prescriptions of authority will not be as effective as those who instinctively take part in student, parent, and community concerns (Furney, Hasazi, Clark, Keefe, & Hartnett, 2003). Even when dealing with special needs students, teachers have discovered that meeting the host of requirements imposed by today's administrators

demands vastly greater attention to individual student needs and abilities (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Teachers have realized that the bland homogenization of the standardized curriculum and tracking approach has formed a new set of exigencies. While attempting to impose the educational requirements required from above, they have shed new light on the intrinsic differences between individual students and focused attention where it is most needed (Furney et al., 2003). Goddard et al. (2000); Hoy, Tarter, and Bliss (1990); Maninger and Powell (2007), and Smith and Piele (2006) linked healthy school climates to teacher satisfaction and high academic achievement because that atmosphere promotes safety, trust, and care.

While their roles in building an effective school cannot be minimized, principals are only members of a team. Recent studies have shown that it is more appropriate to label principals as facilitators of leadership among all school members and staff (McCreight & Salinas, 2013; Moss, 2013). Therefore, a principal would be more effective if authorities consider the talents of staffs, including teachers, and maximize them to help principals reach their potentials as leaders in shaping the success of their students and the school as a whole (Akert & Martin, 2012; Algi et al., 2012; Barth, 2001; Price & Moolenaar, 2015).

Other studies have demonstrated a changing paradigm regarding principals and their roles in the development of the leadership skills of their staff, particularly teachers (Lambert, 2013; Vaz, 2015; Wilhelm, 2013). Their findings noted that effective leadership requires more than focusing on one's leadership skills; instead, it requires

leaders to consider the talents of others, including their followers. Principals can make a school climate more conducive to success and high academic achievement if they take on a team leadership approach (Lambert, 2013; Vaz, 2015; Wilhelm, 2013).

Studies have also shown that most principals are characterized by their management skills rather than their work to improve instruction. However, the reality is that they do more than just manage the budget of the school (Balyer, Karatas, & Alci, 2015; Nsiah & Walker, 2013; Peters & Pearce, 2012). Each day, a principal takes on many responsibilities and tasks. Principals can even be community activists (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). They can engage in many tasks while considering ways to improve student achievement that is usually measured by test scores.

To be effective, leaders should recognize the importance of teams. Leadership activities and duties can be divided among the staff, with each team being responsible for their respective duties (Botha & Triegaardt, 2014; Grant, 2011; Munoz, 2013). While the tasks are divided among the teaching staff, school principals can provide guidance and leadership to ensure that tasks are all consistent with organizational visions and goals (Johnson & Uline, 2005; Lindahl, 2009). This approach enables teachers and other staff members to feel empowered as part of a team and to experience a sense of ownership of their overall functioning within the school (Cotton, 2003). Effective principals shape the school climate to make it more conducive to learning by acting as a shepherd to make certain all parties, from the staff to the teachers to the students, stay on track towards success (Botha & Triegaardt, 2014; Grant, 2011; Munoz, 2013).

Leadership in schools goes beyond theory to a construct that can be and should be represented in daily practice within school settings (Spillane & Hopkins, 2013; Spillane & Kenney, 2012; Starr, 2014). As such, school leadership is described as being an active instead of a passive force in a school. One active leadership method of principals is ensuring that teachers have the means to teach effectively by listening to their comments and suggestions about curriculum (Lai & Cheung, 2014; Petersen, 2014). Because teachers interact with students far more than the principals do, teachers may be better in developing a curriculum that would maximize the potential of learners. Even though the principal governs, teachers can provide valuable suggestions about lessons that might work better to improve student academic achievement and create effective learning experiences (Goff et al., 2014; Lai & Cheung, 2014; Petersen, 2014).

Teacher interactions can lead to valuable insights about what students should learn so they can graduate with clear career goals and skills that would provide them with long-term opportunities (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Therefore, principals must listen to the suggestions and perspectives of teachers (Goff et al., 2014; Lai & Cheung, 2014; Petersen, 2014). The interaction between principals and teachers demonstrates the importance of staff members aside from the team when it comes to school leadership. Usually, principals set the vision of the schools and teachers carry out what principals have decided (Delp, 2014; Harris, 2011; Lai, 2015; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). However, current research has shown that to be effective leaders, principals need to empower teachers to provide practical feedback that would enable visions to become into

reality in the classroom. School leadership, therefore, becomes more effective if it is distributed among various levels of the staff (Delp, 2014; Harris, 2011; Lai, 2015; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). This understanding supports the relevance of finding an answer to RQ2 about what high school principals believe contributes to positive student performance on the SSCE.

The School Climate and Student Achievement

Maximizing students' ability to learn has become essential because students become their country's futures and need to maintain a competitive advantage (Clark & Martorell, 2014; Ko, Hallinger, & Walker, 2012; Pallisera, Vila, & Fullana, 2012). Having successful students should be a goal of everyone, and a positive school climate contributes to student achievement and predicts the degree to which students are likely to graduate and move on to successful educational and career opportunities (Ma, Wilkins, 2002; Mullis, et al., 2009). Research has shown that school climate is directly connected to achievement (Brown 2004; Hoy, Hannum, & Tschannen-Moran, 1998; Lehr, 2010).

In a similar vein, McEvoy and Welker (2000) concluded that schools in low socio-economic environments characterized by a positive school climate can still have high-achieving students. A sense of cohesion is the strongest predictor of achievement of a school, but the relationship between teacher and student is the most important element of achievement (Huesmann, 1994; Krall, 2003; McEvoy & Welker, 2000; Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, & McKay, 2006). Students benefit when teachers' actions and words reflect high expectations for their success (Lehr, 2010).

Principals' actions are primary for strengthening a positive climate. They can engage teachers, students, and families to devise strategies to solve problems and meet high expectations to promote a positive climate for success (Martin, Mullis, & Foy (2008); Mullis, Martin, Gonzalez, & Chrostowski, 2004). Involving teachers, students, and families can contribute to students' growing autonomy and their sense of worth. Many studies have declared that effective leaders can have positive effects on high schools, even though few studies show that effective leaders affect student achievement directly (Bruggencate et al., 2012; Coelli & Green, 2012; Valentine & Prater, 2011).

Valentine and Prater (2011) conducted a statewide study that assessed how a principal's managerial, instructional, and transformational leadership affects student achievement in U.S. public high schools. They found differences in student achievement when they grouped schools by specific principal leadership factors. In particular, principals who promoted instructional and curriculum development led the schools that exhibited high achievement. At the same time, high-performing schools have principals who practice transformational leadership. Transformational principals have the ability to collaboratively achieve their vision for the school and raise student achievement.

According to Nidus and Sadder (2011), who designed a report on principals as formative coaches, instructional leaders could promote a learning-centered environment that provides solutions to students' academic challenges. In addition, principals would likely benefit from formative coaching cycles to improve their classroom observation practices and outcomes.

In a related study, Bruggencate et al. (2012) examined how principals can affect student achievement. The researchers applied structural equation modeling to test a mediated-effects model for school leadership using data gathered from 97 secondary schools in the Netherlands. Bruggencate et al. found that school leaders could positively promote schools by turning them into development-oriented educational organizations to ensure the presence of favorable classroom practices. Although the promotion rate is considered a sign of the principal's efficacy, the researchers found no indications of direct positive effects of the activities of school principals on student achievement.

Coelli and Green (2012) determined the effects of secondary school principals on graduation rates and performance in English, specifically assessed by using student exam scores. Data were derived from a study conducted in Canada with Grade 12 students. Because principals were constantly rotated among schools according to districts, Coelli and Green were able to isolate the effects of the principals on their respective schools. The researchers measured the variance of idiosyncratic effects of the principals on student outcomes and found that high school principals can affect Grade 12 English test scores positively. However, the effects of principals can take years to affect the school. In addition, principals can influence graduation rates to a lesser extent, and Coelli and Green called for measures to retain good principals.

Sebastian and Allensworth (2012) examined the effects of principal leadership on a high school's effectiveness, as measured by quality classroom instruction and high rates of student achievement. The researchers also explored how principals affect key

organizational factors of a school, including professional capacity, parent-community relationship, and the school's learning climate. Sebastian and Allensworth used multilevel structural modeling to reach the conclusion that principals make a difference in student achievement, instruction, and school climate. Sebastian and Allensworth (2012) focused on student improvements under the ACT Education Planning and Assessment System. Using teacher surveys administered to high school teachers in Chicago Public Schools in the 2006 and 2007 school years, they found that principals could lead to variations in classroom instruction through multiple pathways, with the strongest being the professional development programs that principals initiate. Coherence of these programs is also important, as principals can observe whether faculty members practice effective instruction and increase students' learning experiences. Sebastian and Allensworth also found that principals affect the learning climate and recommended that they ensure a safe, college-focused climate. Ensuring a positive learning climate is perceived by many as a high school principal's most important function (Sebastian & Allensworth).

Dornyei and Zoltan (2007) designed contextual investigations directed by the University of Buffalo and State University of New York. The authors discovered that student achievement scores were enhanced following the entry of new principals at three elementary schools. Every leader manifested school competence by making decisions that delivered quick change through a transformational leadership style. These findings showed that every leader concentrated on making the environment safe, disciplined, and

conducive to learning. The researchers concluded that effective principals focus on implementing and encouraging school changes that positively affect both students and teachers (Dornyei & Zoltan).

A study set in Hong Kong also revealed the importance of principals to student achievement (Walker, Lee, & Bryant, 2014). Walker et al. (2014) designed a study to assess the role of principals in different secondary schools in Hong Kong and how they affected student achievement. Using survey data from 179 key staff, 2,037 students from across 42 schools in the country, and analyzing the data using classification and regression tree analysis as well as hierarchical linear modeling, the researchers concluded that principals who practice transparent and open communication are more likely to contribute to academic achievement. In addition, they found that effective principals practice accountability and effective resource management (Walter et al.).

The effect of the principal goes beyond instructional practices. Dunn and Rita (2009) discovered three effects of school leaders on school effectiveness as an outcome of their research. First, the best procedure to drive educator activities was an appreciation of their skill at teaching. Second, chances to straightforwardly lead educators must be set up to support high self-efficiency interactions. Lastly, strategies that require the development of school leaders from school to school restrain the production of interactions expected to impact school achievement.

DuFour and Marzano (2011) assessed how district, school, and classroom leaders can enhance student achievement, highlighting the importance of leading by example and

the nurturing of staff, teachers, and student self-efficacy by being capable themselves. DuFour and Marzano also found that the school leaders' dispositions and attitudes could be contagious. As such, great leaders can encourage individuals to be more responsible and make them more accountable for their own progress by example. Using a broad survey on leadership, the researchers found that the best leaders are those who make others feel competent and capable. The impact of the principal's influence on student academic success is indirect because the school climate affects achievement (Cotton, 2003; Gurr, 1997; Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Hoy & Hannum, 1997). Therefore, understanding how Nigerian principals influence the school climate and teacher expectations and approaches becomes more significant.

This section of the literature showed that the role of school principals across the world has changed since the 1990s, from a hierarchical authoritarian power structure to shared leadership. Researchers have come to perceive schools as like other organizations, even business organizations, using leadership skills and theories from the corporate world that can be incorporated into schools and changed into working policies and practices (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). This understanding supports the relevance of finding an answer to RQ3 on how principals influence a school climate that supports teachers' expectations and approaches and ultimately, student outcomes.

International Roles of High School Principals

Most literature on the important role of high school principals is from the United States, with limited studies from other countries. Effective leadership has been viewed as

the main factor in sustainable school improvement in the United States and the United Kingdom (Mansell, James, & the Assessment Reform Group, 2009; Nir & Hameiri, 2014). Effective school leaders can directly and indirectly influence a school's ability to carry out needed reforms and boost student achievement and performance (Valentine & Prater, 2011). In Nigeria, high school principals occupy a unique position, as they are the leaders who control school resources that are essential to the quality of education that affects the number of students passing the SSCE (Arong & Ogbadu, 2010).

The functions of the school principal have traditionally been managerial and political, but these roles are gradually being redefined to focus on learning, as strong student academic performance and high quality instruction of teachers are the elements that lead to the educational success of a school (Markley, 2008; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2008; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2007; Vitaska, 2008). Providing instructional leadership, therefore, is one of the most important roles of school principals (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2009; Coelli & Green 2012). Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) also observed that student outcomes are significantly improved when leaders work with teachers to plan, coordinate, and evaluate instruction.

Educational leadership, especially the leadership practiced by school administrators, has been studied in the United States since the late 1960s (Spillane, Parise & Sherer, 2011). Some of these studies have established that good leadership contributes to improved teacher performance and positively affects the academic performance of

students (Cheng, 2002; Sergiovannie, 2001). According to Bolam (2002), participative leadership, a practice in which school leaders meet with teachers, can lead to significant improvements in student outcomes. Louis and Miles (1990) asserted that participative leadership, mediated through teachers' activities, can stimulate teachers to work together on common issues and problems associated with instruction and teaching and ultimately improve student outcomes. Principals who nurture an excellent learning climate set high expectations and challenging goals for teachers and students alike, focus on effective instruction, state clear learning objectives, and promote teachers' professional development (Barnes, Camburn, Sanders, & Sebastian, 2010; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). In the same vein, Hattie (2009) stated that one of the most useful tools for creating a student-centered school environment is instructional leadership that supports it.

The Center for Public Education [CPE] (2012), a national resource for data and information on public education and its importance for the United States, issued a report on principal effectiveness containing a comprehensive compilation of studies about principals in low achieving or high poverty schools. According to the report, principals in these schools can shape student academic achievement more than principals in less-challenging schools are able to do. In addition, the review of the studies showed that principal turnover initially can negatively affect a school and that effective principals are the ones who carefully recruit the most effective teachers. The report also revealed that principals get better with more experience (CPE, 2012). Hoque, Alam, and Ghani (2011) pointed out that instructional leaders will take or delegate action that promotes increased

student learning, making instructional achievement the top priority of the school. High quality instructional leadership has moved beyond principals observing classrooms to staffing schools with effective teachers and providing support that enables both students and teachers to reach high levels of success (Finkel, 2012; Samuels, 2012).

The Wallace Foundation (2012), a national philanthropic organization that seeks to enhance the learning experience of disadvantaged children, noted that the practices of American school leaders can affect student achievement. The foundation summarized five core practices that drive the concept of leadership for learning:

1. Shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards.
2. Creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit, and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail.
3. Cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision.
4. Improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost.
5. Managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement. (p. 2)

The Wallace Foundation (2013) also pointed out that attention has shifted from the term *instructional* leader to *learning* leader and noted that school leaders guide teachers to share the goal of education with all students. The leaders also translate standards to a scope-and-sequence curriculum map or implement the scope and sequence

in state-adopted instructional materials. In addition, American school leaders help teachers understand the content and skills that state standards expect of all students. The leaders discuss rubrics with teachers to clarify what students will learn to do. The leaders also help teachers conduct assessments to evaluate learning and provide collegial, honest feedback on teaching, learning, and the structures that will facilitate teacher and student relationships with each other. All of these aspects are very important to make a school run effectively, and understanding principal's perspectives might lead the way to improving schools in Nigeria.

According to Briggs, Davis, and Cheney (2012), principals are responsible for initiating, facilitating, and sustaining a collaborative focus on learning that can affect positive student outcomes. A focus on learning will positively influence teacher-student relationships, as student mastery is identified as the need for specific interventions to support those at risk of failure (CPE, 2012; Vitaska, 2008). To improve student outcomes, principals need to offer direction and lend their expertise (Mendels, 2012; Riley & Coleman, 2011; Simkin, Charner, & Suss, 2010). In particular, Mendels claimed that effective principals are those who can establish and nurture a good instructional climate and carry out sound instructional actions that foster the strong belief that all students can learn.

Leithwood et al. (2010) assessed the results of a new concept of how leadership can affect student learning called the Four Paths, which includes rational, emotional, organizational, and family paths. From the responses of 1,445 teachers to a survey that

measured the leadership practices employed in their schools, Leithwood et al. found that leadership practices can affect the organizational path most and the family path least. As such, the researchers called for Canadian school leaders to focus more on the decisions within the school to make the whole educational environment more conducive to student learning. It was concluded that the principal's efforts are fundamental to raising student achievement (Leithwood et al.). This effect is attributed to the leadership actions principals take to ensure that learning is adequately supported (CPE, 2012). Effective principals are thus able to promote the effectiveness of teachers and ultimately raise academic achievement for all students.

Duke and Solmonowicz (2010) studied a principal's decisions in her first year as a specialist to improve a low-performing urban elementary school in the United States. From the principal's actions and decisions, the researchers learned that effective principals utilize existing resources as force multipliers to ensure all the needs of the students are met. Effective principals also regularly reevaluate these resources and programs to make sure they meet the changing needs of the students. Duke and Solmonowicz claimed that high school principals trying to turn around low-performing schools do more than just create interventions; they also have to make sure the interventions will be effective. Principals also have to make personnel decisions to make sure that staff and faculty hiring is done in the best interests of students (Duke & Solmonowicz). Underlying these perspectives is the sense of the level of influence that high school principals have on a country's educational goals. This influential position

highlights the fact that what is under investigation is the behavior--rather than behavioral intentions--of principals.

Nigerian High School Principals' Challenges and Competencies

Nigerian high school principals play important roles in the country's education. The Ministry of Education, the governing body in Nigerian's centralized education system, appoints principals for public schools, and a school's board of governors appoints principals for private schools. Principals act as a liaison between the school board and the school in both private and public schools, are responsible for ensuring that the instructional practices in their respective schools comply with both the curriculum and SSCE syllabus, and follow local, state, and national policies (Branch et al., 2009). The national curriculum guides both public and private schools in their instructional practices (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Many changes have taken place in the Nigerian school system since 1999. Changes added more responsibilities to Nigerian school leaders to research, establish, and evaluate teaching-learning outcomes. At the same time, they are also required to provide the Ministry of Education with performance-based reports (Obanya, 2002). Before 1999, the traditional roles of school leaders were mainly focused on managing the school facilities, directing and supervising teachers, and establishing positive school-community relationships (Obanya).

The dynamic nature of the Nigerian education system necessitates school leaders to adopt new roles in establishing government policies on how to improve education.

Over time, their roles were mainly focused on instructional leadership, making sure that teachers' capacity and student academic achievement were improving (Walker, Farquhar, & Hughes, 1991). However, because of the gaps in the school system, school leaders in Nigeria have become increasingly expected to effectively manage the school on all fronts, so they should plan, control activities, procure teaching materials, and retrain teachers (Ekundayo & Kolawole, 2013). Aside from these, they are also expected to contribute to the overall staff development plan and maintain school facilities and infrastructure (Ekundayo & Kolawole).

Any experienced teacher may be considered qualified to be a principal, with supervisors and inspectors choosing the principal. However, for a teacher to be chosen as a principal, he or she must have shown excellent classroom management and teaching. With national independence in 1960, it became too complex to maintain these standards. Instead of looking at quality, quantity was necessary, and young and untrained teachers were often assigned to be the principal of a new school (Walker et al., 1991).

Until the 1980s, both primary and secondary school principals lacked training for their administrative functions (Walker et al., 1991), and, in fact, it was not considered important for principals to be trained for administrative duties (Walker et al.). However, Nigerian scholars and education specialists such as Babs Fafunwa and Ben Ukeje claimed that teaching experience alone was not enough to prepare someone to be a principal (Walker et al.). As such, they established a program for the professional preparation of

principals at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This program was the pioneer of modern training programs for Nigerian secondary school principals (Walker et al.).

For the past 30 years, the role of the principal in Nigeria has increasingly become more professional and sophisticated as a result of the dynamic nature of education (Anho, 2011). Moreover, external factors such as the oil boom of the 70s, which brought to the country unprecedented growth and prosperity, also led to the free education at all levels scheme (Walker et al., 1991). Gradually, the principal became one of the most important positions in the educational system, which necessitates consistent training and continuous upgrading (Walker et al.), and serious efforts have been carried out to upgrade the quality of principals through workshops, seminars, as well as in-service programs.

Furthermore, because of contextual variables in schools, the experiences of principals may differ if the school is federal, state, private, or parochial. Principals in the public system do not directly hire and dismiss teachers, but they do provide teachers' performance evaluations to the Ministry of Education and make recommendations (National Policy on Education, 2004). The principals in private schools, however, have direct responsibility for hiring and dismissing teachers. Jurisdictions may vary between states and school type, but most principals share a distinct set of responsibilities such as directing the development, delivery, evaluation, and improvement of the learning experiences of all students enrolled in the school (Richter et al., 2012).

Ayeni (2012), who investigated challenges of Nigerian high school principals to monitor and evaluate an entire school, found that this specific challenge was brought

about by “the emergence of new information technologies, the evolution of the global digital economy, and the global competition for technically skilled workers” (p. 38). Adding to the challenge of meeting the demands of globalization is a poor educational infrastructure in Nigeria, making the job of educators and principals more difficult (Ayeni & Adelabu, 2011). According to Ibara (2014), secondary school principals in Nigeria need professional development to do their jobs better and to improve their school climate and student achievement. Ibara drew on literature about professional development and appointment of school principals and concluded that only skilled personnel who have adequate training and competencies should be the principals of Nigerian secondary schools.

Ibiam (2013) determined that secondary Nigerian school principals should have three specific competencies if they are to be effective. The researcher developed a tool called *Assessing the Competencies of Principals of Unity Secondary Schools* and administered it to 200 teaching and nonteaching staff of the Federal Girls Government College. Ibiam found that principals need high administrative skills in planning, high ability in policy-making, and high capacity to command respect and loyalty from both staff and students. In particular, principals should positively affect their staff and students if they provide the needed materials for teaching and learning. They can also reduce the stress of the staff by giving them the support they need.

Adeniyi and Omoteso (2014) concluded that secondary school principals in Nigeria should also have high emotional intelligence. The researchers evaluated the

relationship between emotional intelligence and administrative effectiveness using a sample of 821 teachers and 1,723 students, drawn from 53 public secondary schools in four states in southwestern Nigeria. Using two instruments, Principals' Administrative Effectiveness Questionnaire and Principals' Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire to collect data from the participants, the researchers found that 65.8% of the teachers reported their secondary principals were very effective. From these findings, the researchers concluded that principals with a high level of emotional intelligence were the ones who exhibited administrative effectiveness (Adeniyi & Omoteso). A major challenge of principals is the mounting pressure to improve student performance. This study puts the principals' requirement to improve student performance and exit scores on the SSCE in southern Nigeria at the foreground of demands.

High School Curriculum Framework

The national high school curriculum framework in Nigeria has established the parameters for learning vital to all students and guides the evaluation and reviews of syllabuses (NERDC, 2011). The purpose of a curriculum framework is to ensure an integration that allows for developmental continuity. The framework is designed to promote balance across stages and between syllabuses, assisting individual schools to avoid unnecessary overlap that can make teachers ineffective in teaching and students unable to learn efficiently (NERDC). The WAEC syllabus is based on a high school curriculum framework that challenges students to meet high but realistic expectations throughout their schooling, guided by professional pedagogy (WAEC, 2013). The

Nigerian high school curriculum framework provides (a) an explanation of the purpose for learning; (b) the general learning outcomes crucial for all students, recognizing that individual schools have the responsibility for educating students through educational experiences that maximize their learning; (c) a flexible design that allows individual schools and teachers to develop structures and practices that meet their students' educational needs; (d) suggests educational opportunities to engage and challenge all students to maximize their individual abilities for lifelong learning; (e) continuity and coherence of learning that is capable of facilitating the transition between high school and college; (f) explicit standards of student achievement and planning for further learning; (g) opportunities for schools and teachers to plan, assess, and report on the extent and quality of student learning; and (h) the standards for identifying students' expected outcomes by the end of the program (NERDC, 2011).

The WAEC syllabus clearly articulates standards that demonstrate what students should know and be able to do at the end of each year of high school. These standards provide the context for a realistic assessment and meaningful reporting of student achievement by individual schools, and each subject syllabus describes how specific content supports the goals of the high school curriculum. The subjects and learning areas in the high school clearly state the structure and prescribe the compulsory core subjects, additional elective subjects, and specialized combinations of core vocations for students to choose from. This structure reveals a rich array of policies and practices to support instructional and assessment practices in schools (WAEC, 2013).

The 2011 curriculum reform in Nigeria promoted interactive forms of learning as opposed to the traditional teacher-dominated classrooms (NERDC, 2011). Under interactive learning, educational technology, and hands-on-activities accompany teacher lectures. Interactive learning approaches suggested in the curriculum documents require effective principals in all schools, because principals are perceived to be influencers, and some teachers are reluctant to use alternative forms of teaching (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Without effective principals who can demonstrate interactive learning, teachers might be less inclined to follow the demands because the school leader cannot do what he asks them to do.

Current Legislation and Its Impact on Leadership and Student Achievement

American initiatives such as NCLB and Race to the Top were designed to improve student achievement by imposing data-driven measurements of student learning and increasing the utilization of research-based teaching methodologies. Even though minor gains have been attained, both initiatives led primarily to significantly increased bureaucracy. Moreover, research studies showed that core strategies linked to the two models did more harm than good, as they impeded classroom practices based in research instead of supporting and encouraging these practices (Bulkley et al. 2004). DuFour and Mattos (2013) claimed that the initiatives also pressured principals to improve student learning by implementing mandated reforms already found to be ineffective in improving student achievement.

In 2010, the President of the United States, Barack Obama, declared the needs and criteria for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in order to remunerate states that had enacted important changes in core educational areas through increasing expectations and rewarding excellence (O'Donnell & White, 2005). These segments included expanding educator and principal viability, achieving value, and improving poorly performing schools. States that were urgently in need of additional funding for education struggled to improve inadequate schools according to the guidelines from the legislation.

To qualify for government funds or rewards for improved student achievement, local educational agencies must partner with their states. School districts are also required to actualize most, if not all, of their state's plan, written according to the law, to receive funds related to this project. These initiatives led to several problems. According to Bulkley, Fairman, and Martinez, (2004), maintaining an effective faculty and being able to improve and sustain student achievement can be difficult for principals under a climate imposed by the national initiatives. Bulkley et al. also found that effective principals show targeted leadership skills, ensure instructors' professional growth, and monitor their efficacy in teaching under such strict initiatives.

Normore and Brooks (2012) also assessed the effects these school reforms in the United States had on educational leaders, finding that initiatives focused on punishing schools and educators that have not met benchmarks has led to intense pressure. The researchers assessed how such a pressure-filled, standards-based accountability

environment shaped school leaders, particularly the principals, and found that the leadership of all school staff holding both formal and informal leadership roles can affect school quality and higher student achievement. That said, not only the principal is expected to improve instructional quality under these reforms. Learning how Nigerian principals influence a positive school climate that supports teacher expectations and approaches is necessary.

Effects of Curriculum Reforms on Principals in Nigeria

NCLB in the United States is comparable to Nigeria's Universal Basic Education (UBE) legislation (Etim, 2007). Olaleye and Oluremi (2013) stated that Nigeria's educational system has gone through several reforms, one of which was the introduction of UBE. Under UBE, students study for a total of 9 years, 6 in primary education and 3 in junior secondary education. UBE was designed with the goal of providing free and compulsory education for all Nigerian children at each level. With such a goal, the UBE requires high levels of motivation and commitment from educators to make sure that the challenges linked with implementation can be resolved quickly. According to Olaleye and Oluremi, UBE focuses attention on school principals. As the school leader accountable for ensuring effective learning cultures in schools, the principals' importance to achieving these reforms cannot be emphasized enough.

In 1999, when the UBE program was inaugurated in Nigeria, there was a massive commitment of human and material resources for implementation. Over the years, inspection also became one of the most common activities carried out to improve the

quality of education in schools. However, Matthew (2012) found that uncooperative school administrators and teachers were the main challenge faced by inspectors.

According to Matthew, many teachers and administrators were skeptical of the value of inspection and were likely to be uncooperative when being inspected. Some teachers perceived themselves to be above inspection and made up lesson notes to make themselves look effective in the eyes of the inspectors (Matthew). As such, the effects of UBE on school principals and faculty was suspect, probably negative, and lacked the desired effect of ensuring compliance.

Apart from UBE, implementation of new Nigerian curriculum initiatives has been found to have significant effects on the professional practices of some school administrators and teachers in high schools across Enugu state (Nzekwe, 2013). Nzekwe explored the effects of implementing the revised Nigerian curriculum on public and private high school teachers and administrators in Enugu State. Ten teachers and one administrator in each school were interviewed about their experiences with the initiative, using MacShane and Von Glinow's (2003) MARS model of individual behavior and performance. The study revealed that school administrators with a heavy workload, insufficient funds, and inadequate remuneration reported that their professional practices had been negatively affected by the new curriculum initiative. Teachers who did not have their principals' support and lacked motivation to comply also had negative perceptions of the new curriculum initiative. The study's strengths lay in showing how administrators might be affected by system-wide changes. The researchers also noted that administrators

and teachers who lacked instructional materials, support, and manageable workloads struggled with system-wide changes and suggested principals should have autonomy in running their schools (Nzekwe).

When new reforms have been enacted, curriculum reforms have affected a principal's behaviors and actions. Lee, Hallinger and Walker (2012) assessed the effects of macro-context factors on principals in Nigeria and in particular, determined how the nation's economy, society, and educational system all affect how principals perceive their job and how they carry out their tasks and roles. The researchers used a two-level hierarchical linear model on data gathered from 5,927 principals across 34 societies, including Nigeria, and found that economic, socio-cultural, and institutional features of the societies where their schools were located can affect a principal's effectiveness. In other words, there may be discrepancies among countries regarding expectations about student performance and legislation, findings that may serve as a foundation for answering the third research question of this study: How can Nigerian high school principals influence their school climate as their schools prepare students for the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination? An understanding of the common goal of improving student achievement is imperative.

Assessment as a Tool for Measuring Learning

The SSCE is the primary tool for determining senior high school students' terminal achievement in Nigeria, and periodic assessments are necessary for measuring learning (Dirksen, 2011; Thomas, 2008). The educational sector uses assessment tools to

determine how effective the educational system is and to gauge learner progress, teacher performance, and school administrators at the local and national levels (Ball & Christ, 2012; Bass, Contant, & Carin, 2009). However, the structure and influence of assessment depends on the purpose of that assessment (Clarke, 2011). Teachers administer school-based assessments for measuring student learning. Such tests have a different structure from standardized tests, the results of which are used to produce support for high-stakes decisions such as deciding the suitability of an individual for employment or further study (Dirksen; Keeley, 2008). Mansell, James, and the Assessment Reform Group (2009) summarized the purposes of assessment systems as being expected to lead to better understanding, as well as to better pupil-teacher and teacher-parent relationships. Using assessment data can also improve school accountability for student achievement.

Kaufman, Guerra, and Platt (2006) noted, “The value of an educational program is based on how well that program meets the needs gap in results and consequences of society” (p. 2). The level of educator knowledge determines the strength of the educational program, and results of assessments provide evidence of the program’s success. Kaufman et al. also stated some traditional reasons for evaluation: (a) to see whether a solution to a problem is working, (b) discover the cause of a problem, (c) confirm compliance with a mandate, (d) sort out a mess, (e) bring about a change in societal consciousness, (f) provide feedback to control a program, and (g) satisfy the requirements of law (p. 8).

According to Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010), as well as Dirksen (2011), with assessment data, teachers can identify levels of student achievement, adjust their time allocation or teaching methods accordingly, set challenging yet realistic expectations for students, and design a reward system to encourage and support students to strive for further achievement. The relevance of assessment data suggests that an accurate and valid description of those data is essential to effective instructional delivery. Such knowledge should enable educators to design instruction and provide useful feedback to students.

In a quantitative study using surveys from 151 public school principals across the United States, Valenti (2010) found that the systematic use of student testing data for planning was a characteristic of academically effective schools. Similarly, in Hallinger's (2010) longitudinal case study, higher student achievement occurred when assessment data informed instructional strategies. Sandfort (2009) also suggested the importance of principals' leadership in maintaining a student-centered focus through assessment data. In addition, to facilitate students' progress and increase their motivation, principals should use assessment data to monitor instructional practices (Bahadori et al., 2012; Stanley, 2007). In the conclusion of a qualitative phenomenological study on the impact of high-stakes standardized testing on those who had not passed the test, Kearns (2011) observed that young people were concerned about the power of one test having such an impact on their school choices and potentially future possibilities, as well as its causing them stress

for a lengthy period. They believed that adults or people in positions of authority did not care about their feelings (p. 15).

These findings suggested that principals should listen to students, considering the impact of high-stakes test scores on their lives. High school principals in Nigeria need to be more proactive in influencing positive outcomes in the academic performance of students (Ayeni, 2010). Thus, it becomes the responsibility of principals to attend to the needs of students and address the adverse effects of any poor academic performance. These studies indicated a strong link between data-driven practices and higher student achievement. Therefore, it would be relevant to focus on principals' actual behaviors regarding effective data-driven practices.

Henry (2011) examined principals' use of summative and formative assessment data for improving academic achievement in four key areas: (a) level of preparation of high school principals to use assessment data, (b) the value they place on both summative and formative assessment data, (c) the ways principals use assessment data to improve achievement, and (d) support of and barriers to effective data use by school principals. Henry concluded from the analysis that the effectiveness of the school's curriculum design and instructional practices could be monitored using assessment data. However, principals' development in data-driven practices could not be measured. To this end, principals' development of the use of assessment data was not emphasized, even though principals play the main role in promoting effective instructional decisions and are held accountable for the ways their mandates affect results.

Principals and teachers commonly use summative assessment achievement data for school improvement decisions (Wayman, Brewer, & Stringfield, 2009). On the other hand, formative or school-based continuous assessments administered by teachers involve a variety of assessment methods that comply with the procedures and policies stated in a school's syllabus (Osunde, 2008). Student scores on these assessments are reported using evaluations and grades to describe one student's achievement compared to others (Popham, 2010).

In Nigeria, formative and summative assessment data are used to assess student achievement (Ministry of Education, 2013). These types of assessment data are relevant to this study because during the final year of high school, WAEC organizes summative assessments for students and determines the grade earned by students in each subject. The assessment results have improved schools, as the data have been utilized to improve staff professional development programs and encourage collaboration in discussing academic performance to identify curricular strengths and weakness (Wayman et al., 2009).

Success on the SSCE

The SSCE was adopted to align with and enrich the high school curriculum, to ensure that students who graduate from high school have the knowledge and skills necessary to proceed to college, do well in the labor force, and succeed in life (National Policy on Education, 2004). The introduction of the SSCE in 1989 replaced the General Certificate of Education (GCE) as a graduation requirement. The SSCE syllabus was designed to ensure that (a) students are engaged in and take responsibility for their

learning by clearly demonstrating the requisite knowledge, skills, and values to be assessed; (b) teachers positively influence learning relative to defined standards; (c) flexibility programs, structures, and pedagogical practices meet the educational needs of students; and (d) continuity by providing a developmental sequence of learning for specific subjects, aims, and objectives of the course in relation to outcomes and content. (WAEC, 2013)

The purpose of public examinations is to produce an objective, graded qualification that society, employers, or colleges can use to decide whether an applicant meets the requirements for a transaction, employment, or further study (Thomas, 2008). The credibility of a school is often judged by its students' academic performance and may even be used to assess the overall educational system. Despite the weaknesses of assessing the suitability of a person by using public examinations, the process remains the most-used tool for that purpose (Thomas).

A school's high passing rates on the SSCE suggest that students, parents, and the government's efforts are effective, that more students will be qualified to enroll in college, and that they have acquired the knowledge necessary for success in life. A large pool of citizens with a college education is important to meet the demands of a globalized labor force (World Bank, 2013). Professionals with the appropriate educational background can advance and improve society (World Bank, 2011). Success on the SSCE is pivotal because it is designed to determine which students qualify for college admission. Sebastian and Allensworth (2012) argued that high school principals have the

largest influence on school achievement through school culture and climate because positive instructional leadership is associated with classroom instruction and higher student achievement. It is therefore important to determine what principals perceive to be the causes of failure on the SSCE and the significance they place on the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement, which are the goals of the current study.

Factors Affecting Student Performance on the SSCE

Effective principal leadership has an academic impact on schools, although many other factors affect student achievement, from test type to school type (Ololube, 2008). Muhammed and Akanle (2008) examined the socioeconomic factors influencing student academic performance in Oyo, Nigeria, using questionnaires administered to 60 male and 60 female high school students. The study revealed that family income and government funding are not significant factors in motivating student achievement. This finding is similar to other studies on factors affecting academic performance (Palardy, 2013).

Fabunmi, Brai-Abu, and Adenigji (2007), who designed another study set in Nigeria, reported that classroom space is a factor affecting student achievement. This finding is based on data gathered through questionnaires from 200 high schools in Oyo State, Nigeria, suggesting that the government has not provided enough infrastructural development for effective learning. Alabi (2008) found that school size and facilities contributed 57% to the variation in academic performance. Lack of professionally qualified teachers in schools, insufficient facilities, retention, and poor principal leadership are among other factors negatively affecting learning (Alaka, 2011).

Some researchers (Akpan, 2008; Balogun, 2009; Ukpai & Okoro, 2011) asserted that poor student performance could be traced to curricular inadequacies. They argued that academic challenges are primarily focused on low academic ability and negative self-concept. These arguments supported Duze's (2011) remarks that the achievement of students on public examinations in Nigeria, especially in the core subject areas of mathematics and English language, was below expectations at the time of the research. These findings implied that the objectives of high schools, as stated in the national policy of education, were not being attained, especially regarding preparing students adequately for college.

Reliability of the SSCE

Because of the high rates of failure on the SSCE, some studies have questioned the validity of the questions that are asked in the assessment test. Amajuoui, Joseph, and Udoh (2013) assessed the content validity of the May/June West African SSCE questions in chemistry from 1999 to 2002. In addition, the researchers evaluated the taxonomic spread of the content of the Senior Secondary School Core Curriculum during the same period. As such, the core curriculum for chemistry and WASSCE chemistry question papers served as the main sources of data analyzed by the cited researchers. In particular, Amajuoyi et al. compared 170 performance objectives from the core curriculum and 590 questions from the examination papers against cognitive labels. The results showed that the tests cannot be considered valid because some topics were overemphasized, while others were underemphasized. There were even important subject areas that were not

covered by the test questions for chemistry. In addition, the questions emphasized lower levels of the cognitive domain such as knowledge and comprehension rather than levels that required synthesis or creativity. The findings led to the conclusions that both teachers and the examiners of the SSCE should suggest additional topics in the core curriculum at various relevant cognitive levels. An additional suggestion was that those who create questions on the SSCE should consult test experts to make sure the questions have high content validity and reflect a wide range of cognitive demands.

In addition, some have claimed that these certification exams are problematic because of the ethical issues associated with them. Even if the examinations are considered strategically important, their integrity and credibility have been questioned and negatively affected because of increasing incidents and reports of examination malpractice. According to Olagboye (2004), the credibility of the exams has been questioned so many times that most Nigerians and stakeholders such as prospective employers across industries have already lost confidence in their value. Adeyemi (2010) designed a study to look at the credibility of the SSCE and warned that the government and other major stakeholders should worry about the threat of examination malpractice and its effects on the educational system and overall national development. Adeyemi even claimed that because of the increasing number of examination malpractice events in the country, student graduates could suffer as the value of their credentials has become equally questioned.

Methodological Review

Most of the researchers who investigated the factors leading to the success or failure of students on the SSCE used quantitative methodology. Only one study that used qualitative methodology was found that was related to the Nigerian educational system, research conducted by Aydin (2013), who explored the perceptions of four stakeholders regarding the educational effectiveness of Nigerian Turkish International Colleges. Data were collected using interviews and classroom observations. The results showed that academic achievement is encouraged in classrooms of educators who promote nondiscrimination policies and are dedicated to improving the quality of education.

Awondun, Olusola, and Oyeniya (2013) assessed the effects of continuous assessment, mock results, and gender on physics students' SSCEs achievement in Ekiti, Nigeria, adopting an ex post facto survey design for the study. Awondun et al. asked 450 students to complete a survey designed to determine whether the variables of assessment tests, mock results, and gender could lead to success in passing tests. An analysis of the survey indicated that all three factors could have a significant relationship to success on the SSCE. The quantitative method used by Awondun et al. also showed the predictive powers of assessment tests, mock results, and gender on student achievement in physics. Through this quantitative study, school authorities discerned that their students may succeed more or perform better on the test if they are first given mock examinations and assessments. In addition, because gender can predict student achievement in physics, the researchers concluded that both internal and external assessments should be administered

without gender bias. Although the quantitative method revealed the relationship of these variables to SSCE achievement, the method did not explain the perceptions of principals.

Gbore and Daramola (2013) assessed the effects of particular teachers' variables as well as students' attitudes towards academic achievement in biology in senior high schools in Ondo State, Nigeria. The researchers used descriptive survey research as well as an ex post facto research design to carry out the investigation. Using a stratified random sampling technique, the researchers identified 360 participants, 180 of whom were teachers and the other 180 students from 36 high schools across the 36 districts of Ondo State. The variables were measured using the teaching attitudinal scale, science-oriented attitudinal scale, and an inventory that requested data from records on students' SSCE grades in biology. Through a quantitative method, the researchers learned that perceptions of the exam was the most predictive of the variables assessed and that student attitudes could suggest whether a student would pass or fail the exam.

The quantitative method employed by Gbore and Daramola (2013) enabled them to assess the extent of each variable's effects. If student attitudes were the most influential, then teachers' workloads was the least influential. The researchers were able to recommend that teachers be given more workshops and seminars by the government to improve their teaching skills and their influence on student success, but the quantitative method did not reveal how student attitudes and teacher variables led specifically to student success or failure on the SSCE. Although Gbore and Daramola were able to recommend that teachers and students should change their attitudes towards the teaching

and learning of biology to pass the exam, they were not able to understand what barriers and what factors would help to create a positive attitude. They were unable to have the in-depth conversations with participants that a qualitative method typically provides for researchers.

Lawal (2010) used a quantitative method to analyze factors that may affect achievement on the SSCE, specifically the factors influencing student knowledge of Christianity, a high school subject. Lawal gathered 300 students from five high schools and through chi-square analysis, and determined that students with positive attitudes, high levels of interest, and a good understanding of Christianity were the ones who performed well. The quantitative method also allowed the researcher to establish a significant relationship between socioeconomic status and performance on the exam, as those with high socioeconomic status performed better than those from a low socioeconomic background. The study also showed gender disparities, as girls performed better than boys did. Students who were arts-oriented also performed better than science-oriented students did. While Lawal's study showed how predictive certain demographic and socioeconomic variables might be, the quantitative method did not allow the researcher to study personal perceptions of the participants and make key interpretations. Open-ended questions, dialogue, and reflective structural analysis can better lead to fuller understanding of perceptions (Moustakas, 1994).

Understanding perceptions allowed analysis of the different descriptions of principals who participated in this study. A qualitative case study was used to assess the

perceptions of principals of student performance on the SSCE, a method considered an appropriate approach to gain insights into an individual's motivations and actions (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2011). Understanding the importance that high school principals place on the SSCE can contribute to the field of education, especially in Nigeria, with regard to how principals can facilitate effective schools that support academic achievement. In addition, the findings might also create an awareness of how Nigerian high school principals' behaviors and actions reflect their expressed commitments as their schools prepare students for the SSCE.

Summary and Conclusions

In Chapter 2, I presented the available research literature about the conceptual framework of the study, the principal's influence on school climate, impact of school climate on teachers' approaches and expectations, the school climate and student achievement, and the international roles of high school principals. This chapter also described Nigerian high school principals' challenges and competencies, high school curriculum framework, current legislation and its impact on leadership and student achievement, and effects of curriculum reforms on principals in Nigeria. It also presented an overview of assessment as a tool for measuring learning, success at the SSCE, and factors affecting student performance on the SSCE. According to the available peer-reviewed literature, effective principal leadership is necessary to improve student achievement; however, effective leadership has to be sustained so that learning can increase consistently (Hoque et al., 2011).

The importance of secondary education to the economic, social, and human capital development of a nation cannot be overemphasized. This is because the secondary level of education aims to graduate students who (a) embrace cultures, dress style, and food alien to theirs; (b) are adventurous towards all learning and acquisition of knowledge; (c) display discretion in the management of time by strictly adhering to a school's timetable of activities; (d) display a nondiscriminatory attitude towards everyone, irrespective of ethnicity and nationality; (e) appreciate diligence and discretion as potent attributes for greatness; (f) are proficient in the use of the technology as a learning tool; and (g) understand that learning is perpetual (Obanya, 2002). Secondary education is a significant link between primary education, tertiary education, and the workforce. The ability of secondary education to connect adolescents to their different destinations in life is more important than ever before (World Bank, 2013).

However, the current poor achievement levels on the Nigerian SSCE, however, continue to be an area of major concern regarding Nigeria's ability to produce adequate human capital to support all sectors of the national economy (Emiloju & Adeyoju, 2012). Students who fail to transition successfully to achieve their aspirations after secondary education due to poor academic performance are more likely to engage in criminal activities and use drugs (Kearns, 2011). The personal and societal costs of these poor achievement levels call for a reflective approach towards achieving desired student outcomes (Abdullahi & Onasanya, 2010). The literature generated a long list of effective school characteristics, including strong principal leadership for promoting a positive

school climate, a quality that has been identified as one of the most important determinants of educational outcomes (Uyanga, 2008).

Principals are an important factor in understanding the high failure rates on the SSCE because their schools should know students' levels of readiness to sit for the exam after the students have spent 6 years in high school and have written the school-based mock examination that is a replica of the SSCE (Afemikhe, 2002). Associating effective leadership with improved school climate has proved the possibility of improving the academic achievements of students through the leadership of the principal. Schools with effective principals tend to have better professional learning communities that lead to higher student achievement (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009).

The available literature also suggested that there are no studies of how Nigerian high school principals influence a climate that supports teachers' expectations and approaches as their schools prepare students for the SSCE. Although research has documented several factors affecting the performance of students on the SSCE, no research has documented the perceptions of high school principals who direct the activities that affect students preparing for the SSCE. In Chapter 3, I will describe the research design and rationale, role of the researcher in the research process, methodology, and strategies to ensure trustworthiness and ethical procedures. Chapter 3 will also include a presentation of the methodology I used to reach the conclusions of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The need of Nigerian high schools for students to pass the SSCE and enroll in college informed my decision to undertake this research. Therefore, the purpose of this case study was to describe principals' perceptions of student performance on the SSCE and their influence on school climate and teacher expectations and approaches as their schools prepare students for the exam. I designed the study by linking the RQs to the multiple case study research tradition, the research sample and population, the method of data collection and procedures for data management, data analysis methods, and issues of ethical consideration (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). In this chapter, I will present the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, the criteria adopted when selecting participants, methods of data collection, data analysis, strategies for ensuring trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The questions that guided this research study using qualitative data from multiple sources were as follows:

RQ1: What reasons do Nigerian high school principals attribute to student failure on the SSCE?

RQ2: What significance do Nigerian high school principals place on the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement?

RQ3: How do Nigerian high school principals influence school climate and teacher expectations and approaches as their schools prepare students for the SSCE?

In this study, I used the constructivist paradigm to attempt to answer the RQs. According to Stake (1995), constructivism is based on social interpretations because different people construct meaning in different ways from the same events. A qualitative approach is fundamentally anchored in a concern for developing in-depth understanding of both a particular phenomenon and the construction of meaning that individuals attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 1999). According to Merriam (1998), using multiple cases in a study makes the findings and interpretations more compelling and representative of the entire population.

This multiple case study was conducted in six high schools in a large city in the southern part of Nigeria to learn the perceptions of principals about student performance on the SSCE during the 2015–2016 academic year. Data from schools in this city showed an increase in the failure rate of 70% on the 2014 SSCE compared to the failure rate of 53% in 2013 (WAEC, 2014). Failure of over half of the students is a cause for concern (Emiloju & Adeyoju, 2012).

The phenomenon of focus in this study was the role of principals' perceptions on the performance of teachers, and ultimately, student performance on the SSCE. To explore this phenomenon within the context of the purpose and RQs of the study, I employed a multiple case study design. Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study because this approach focuses on making sense of individual perceptions or experiences within the context of certain phenomena related to culture, history, socioeconomic status, community, or organizational dynamics (Leedy & Ormond, 2010;

Polit & Beck, 2010; Silverman, 2011). The choice of a qualitative approach can afford a researcher the opportunity to explore behaviors, perspectives, and experiences in detail (Patton, 2002). Yin (2011) stated that a qualitative research design allows the exploration of the perceptions and insights of participants concerning an issue under investigation. Furthermore, qualitative researchers attempt to understand how participants interpret the meaning of their experiences related to the RQs (Moustakas, 1994).

In the design phase of this study, I considered several research designs from different research traditions such as quantitative and mixed methods before I chose the qualitative approach. The quantitative method was not suitable because I was not testing a hypothesis in this study (Patton, 2002). The mixed methods approach was not suitable because it would not help me gain a deep understanding of an existing pattern based on participants' perspectives. Therefore, I opted for the qualitative method as the appropriate research approach because it provides rich details from participants (Merriam 1999).

Qualitative research serves primarily to understand the meaning people construct to gain inductive insight into their experiences (Merriam 1999). In this descriptive study, I collected, organized, and summarized the causes of student failure on the SSCE according to high school principals, the significance the principals on the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement, and how principals influence school climate and teacher expectations and approaches as their schools prepare students for the exam. In addition, the nature of the research supported the choice of qualitative study because the views of participants were analyzed, and multiple sources of data collection provided rich

information (Yin, 2011). The experiences of principals may differ by the type of school due to contextual variables in schools (federal, state, private, or parochial). For that reason, I employed a comparative approach to explore similar cases in different school types and to determine the possibility of replication (Yin, 2009).

The perceptions of principals must be studied with caution because views of all participants must be both respected and supported. Due to the numerous contextual variables in schools, the experiences of principals from different schools within the same state may vary in terms of socioeconomic background and school size. Additionally, I used a comparative case study approach in this study because of the need to explore similar cases from different schools (Yin, 2009). The rationale for this choice of method was consistent with the purpose of qualitative research (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Among case study research designs, the multiple case study was the most appropriate for this study because it includes the collection and analysis of data from multiple cases (Yin, 2011). This study included a detailed account and analysis of six cases from the federal, state, and private school types (Merriam, 1998). Each case had multiple units of analysis derived from sources (e.g., interviews with principals; focus group interviews with lead teachers; a review of documents, such as SSCE spreadsheets for the past 2 years, policy statements, the school logbook, minutes of meetings, the announcement book, and organizational charts). This research design enabled extensive data collection from participants and gave me insight into the perceptions of principals in different schools. The participants were drawn from three schools with a record of 80%

of students passing the SSCE and three schools where average student achievement had not reached this passing rate for the past 4 years. The case study approach enabled me to collect differing perceptions of high school principals about student performance on the SSCE to gain a deeper understanding of the central phenomenon and provide credible answers to the RQs.

The multiple case study research design also allows for comparison of groups of individuals within bounded systems (Merriam, 1988). According to Yin (2011), the “case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (p. 2). The case study research design is an empirical inquiry method that can help the researcher explore a new issue within its real-life context, specifically if the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). A case can be an object, person, or a program. This research design allowed me to answer the RQs for a thorough understanding of and the discovery of new knowledge within this professional discipline (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2011). This research design includes analyzing multiple cases of phenomena to gain a comprehensive understanding of a topic (Merriam, 1988).

Before deciding on the case study research design, I reviewed other commonly used qualitative approaches: narrative, grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology. Using grounded theory is suitable for researchers seeking to generate an emergent theory, while ethnography is appropriate for researchers focusing on the cultural descriptions of observations, communication, and interaction with members of a

group (Moustakas, 1994). Grounded theory and ethnography did not align with my intent because I was not seeking to generate a theory or study the culture of participants. The narrative approach, which requires gathering stories from participants about their experiences, would have been too general to be appropriate. According to Rubin and Rubin (2004), the phenomenological design enables the researcher to explore the perceptions of participants comprehensively and gather in-depth descriptions of lived experiences, but it also was not the appropriate method for this study because my focus was on perceptions of participants and not their lived experiences.

Using the qualitative case study research approach, I employed face-to-face interviews with six principals; focus group interviews with 48 lead teachers; and an analysis of relevant documents, including policy statements, announcements, school logbook, SSCE spreadsheets for past 2 years, and minutes of meetings. According to Yin (2011), interviews should provide rich insight and context on the topic, as respondents will describe what they believe and what is important to them. The use of an inappropriate method or inaccuracy in collecting data could have had a significant negative impact on the results of the study, and I ensured that all procedures were followed exactly and consistently and that all data were kept secure.

The essence of this research was to capture detailed accounts of the concepts under study and determine the link between principals' perceptions and student performance on the SSCE. To obtain a wider coverage of rich data, I used artifacts, such as documents, to supplement data collected from interviews and focus groups (Yin,

2009). The choice of a case study as this study's design was justified because of the importance of the context and sources from which information was gathered. A case study is justified when there are unclear boundaries between the case and context (Yin, 2003). Aligning this research with Yin's (DATE) assertions led to my choice of a multiple case study design because contextual conditions are pertinent to this research. The study of the perceptions of principals of student performance on the SSCE in southern Nigeria bound the research to a specific location.

Role of the Researcher

As the primary investigator, it was my responsibility to conduct the entire study throughout all of its stages of data collection, data analysis, and report writing. To that end, I sought the necessary consent and permission from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), which issued me approval number 04-12-16-0149163. I made a personal visit to the director of high schools at the Ministry of Education in the city where the study was conducted and secured permission to access the pool of possible participants and identify prospective participants for the study. The Ministry of Education supervises all schools in the city and is the custodian of all official and essential information to help identify schools.

The criteria I employed in the selection of prospective participants included the current principals of three high schools who have a record of 80% of students passing the SSCE, principals of three schools where students have experienced consistent failure, and principals with 3 or more years of SSCE administration experience in their current

schools. The criteria for selecting the eight lead teachers from each school for the focus group interviews was 2 or more years' experience in their current schools and agreement from the principal to participate in the study. I secured the acceptance of the identified schools to participate through personal visits to respective principals and lead teachers. In addition, I secured the approval of the prospective participants to access relevant school documents, such as school logbook, policy statements, minutes of meetings, and announcement book in an effort to answer my RQs (Merriam, 1998).

To collect data, I conducted interviews with individual principals and focus groups with lead teachers at each school, including audiotaping of these interviews with participants' permission. Furthermore, I transcribed the interviews for data analysis and interpretation. To ensure participants' anonymity and confidentiality, I provided a collaborative interviewing environment, did not attach names of participants to their interview responses, and ensured that data were kept safe and secure (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2011). I made every effort to remain objective by keeping the discussion focused on answering the RQs and allowing the respondents' perspectives to emerge (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). I set aside any thoughts, judgments, and prejudice to try to ensure objective reporting during the interviews by noting any of my doubts and reflections (Moustakas, 1994).

According to Yin (2011), researcher bias can be attributed to the researcher's background, motive for undertaking the study, and personal filters. I am a Nigerian high school principal; however, I am not the principal of a school that participated in this

study. I do not have any authority over the principals or teachers in the schools in this study. Consequently, I employed measures to address the possibility of subjectivity. I maintained a high level of consciousness about any bias and tried to remain objective throughout the research process. Furthermore, I used peer reviews and member checking to further enhance the credibility of the study findings (Goulding, 2002). I also documented category development to foster openness, minimize any possible bias or subjectivity, and ensure trustworthiness.

Methodology

The methodology section provides a description of the research population, sampling procedures, data collection, and analysis. I will present in detail the sample size, procedures for selecting participants, and the strategies I employed to gain access to participants. In addition, I will explain data collection, instrumentation, and the data analysis plan as well as issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Participant Selection Logic

The target population was principals and lead teachers who are involved in or knowledgeable about the SSCE. There are 574 principals in the geographic area. This city in the southern part of Nigeria was purposefully selected for this research because it is one of the cities with over 50% poor performance on the SSCE irrespective of its location in the rich Niger Delta region. The schools rank within the area of students failing the SSCE. Most principals in the southern part of Nigeria have over 5 years of experience in SSCE administration.

Sampling Procedures

Polkinghorne (2005) stated that qualitative research involves the selection of participants and pertinent documents for a study to enable the researcher to gain in-depth understanding of the concept being studied. Given that the goal of qualitative studies is to describe, understand, and clarify human experience, the use of knowledgeable participants and relevant documents pertinent to the research study enable researchers to triangulate findings (Wertz, 2005). For this research tradition, the preferred selection criterion is experience and not representativeness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Consequently, purposeful selection of participants is an important decision to qualitative study (Polkinghorne).

I purposefully selected participants from a pool of participants according to their years of work experience and student performance on the SSCE to serve as key informants because they have useful information and insight into the case (Goulding, 2002). Barratt, Choi, and Li (2011) claimed that participants who are selected purposively are often more willing to participate and are more likely to contribute to the richness of the data for the study. Moreover, purposive sampling is a sampling technique commonly used for qualitative studies that focus on inclusion and exclusion criteria for their sample (Barratt et al., 2011).

Based on the RQs of this study, a homogeneous purposive sampling was employed, because questions required that in-depth information be gathered from a specific group (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The common characteristics of the

homogeneous sample were the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participation. Criteria for selecting principals included current high school principals in a private, state, or federal government school, current high school principals of three schools who have a record of 80% credit pass on the SSCE, and three schools in which students have experienced consistent failure. The principals would also have led their current schools for 3 or more years. These selection criteria are appropriate for consistency and for well-defined participant characteristics of the sample. The criteria for selecting the eight lead teachers for the focus group interviews was those in schools whose principals have agreed to participate in this study and who have worked with the current principal for 2 or more years in their current schools. In addition, lead teachers are senior teachers who are more knowledgeable than other teachers about school activities and SSCE administration.

I used the maximum variation strategy to capture a detailed description of participants' diverse experiences from the different schools. Thus, I collected assorted accounts of the views of principals and teachers from six schools to equally represent the federal, state, and private school types. Although Patton (1990) emphasized diversity was characteristic of this type of study, maximum variation strategy was employed because principals' perceptions are a sensitive issue. Therefore, I acquired a fuller perspective from different participant's accounts through interviews to provide a thorough understanding. Applying this sampling strategy enabled me to appreciate different views of all school types.

Different strategies such as homogeneous purposive sampling, criterion, maximum variation, theory-based, and confirmatory sampling strategies were used in this study. Theoretical propositions about the cases can be explored during the data analysis stage (Yin, 2009). The use of theoretical proposition during data coding and categorizing enabled me to examine the collected and analyzed data for relationships used to confirm the proposition (Yin).

I initially sought the approval of the director of high schools through the Ministry of Education in Nigeria to access relevant information about schools and their principals in the state. The control of education in Nigeria is centralized, with the Ministry of Education responsible for making and implementing educational policies in the country. The Ministry of Education is the official primary point of contact for all schools in the research area and would have the essential information to help identify schools that meet the specific criteria for this study. Assistance from the director for high schools at the ministry was needed to help identify and select participants.

Therefore, I requested an appointment with the director by personal visit to the ministry. My conversation with the director included a brief explanation of the study, its purpose, assurances of participant confidentiality, and the criteria for selecting participants. The specific selection criteria were to ensure consistency and well-defined participant characteristics.

The initial contact with each prospective participant was through a phone call to request an appointment and included a brief explanation of the study and its purpose.

During the face-to-face visit with prospective participants, I presented details of the study's purpose and assured them of confidentiality. In addition, I described the criteria I used to identify the schools, principals, and lead teachers. The discussion reaffirmed the fact that confidentiality would be assured. I then asked them to read the consent forms and either accept or decline to participate within 2 days (See Appendices C and E).

To enable me to collect rich data, my sample size included six principals from all school types and eight lead teachers from each school. From the federal school type, I selected two principals: One was selected from a federal school with a record of 80% passing on the SSCE and another from a federal school in which a majority of students have consistently failed. They have served in their current schools for 3 or more years. The pattern was repeated for state and private schools, providing an equal distribution of two schools from the federal, two from the state, and two from the private sector. In a similar manner, eight lead teachers from each school where the principal agreed to participate were selected by asking for volunteers. The first eight lead teachers to volunteer were the ones selected.

The selection of participants and pertinent documents for a qualitative research study is essential to the success and relevance of the study because the goal of qualitative research is to describe and clarify human experiences (Patton, 2002). Such knowledge enabled me to gain an understanding of the topic and to triangulate findings.

Furthermore, selected participants had experience with and knowledge of the SSCE and were willing to share the information (Yin, 2001). Given that the unit of analysis in

qualitative tradition is experience, the sample size was large enough to ascertain credibility but small enough to allow details and depth for each unit of analysis (Patton, 2002). Therefore, increasing the understanding of the phenomenon was more appropriate than reporting on different population segments (Yin, 2009).

Sampling in qualitative research, however, should be representative of the population studied to allow the generalization of claims to a similar or entire population (Polkinghorne, 2005). According to Wertz (2005), the nature of the research problem and the potential yield of results determine sample size for qualitative studies. Similarly, Mason (2010) declared that refraining from stating sample sizes for qualitative researchers is ideal, since the saturation point cannot be determined by estimating the optimal sample size at the research stage. However, I remained open to expanding the number of participants if necessary.

Sampling decisions in case studies should target experienced participants who can increase understanding of the case being studied (Patton, 2002) and should permit detail and depth for each unit of analysis to ensure that objectives are met (Yin, 2009). The selection of three principals from schools with a record of 80% passing the SSCE and three from schools in which students have consistently failed provided what could be learned about the phenomenon (State, 1995).

Instrumentation

The most important part of the research is data collection because accuracy is essential to the validity of the results (Moustakas, 1994). As I was the primary instrument

for data collection in this research, I alone collected and analyzed the data at all stages. Because this role required that I capture significant data (Yin, 2011), I used a broad range of sampling and data collection strategies to ensure that data were adequate (Goulding, 2002; Morrow, 2005; Polkinghorne, 2005). To answer the RQs honestly and exhaustively I gathered data for triangulation. These data came from face-to-face interviews with principals, focus group interviews with lead teachers at each school, and documents such as policy statements, SSCE spreadsheets for the past 2 years, school logbooks, announcements, minutes of meetings, and the school organizational chart (Polkinghorne). I ensured the validity of the interview protocols through a pilot study, with multiple data sources and multiple data collection methods likely to enhance the validity in the study (Yin, 2009). Triangulation of data occurred as I conducted follow-up member checking to determine if the transcripts of the interviews were compliant with the participants' recollections of their comments. At this time, participants were also offered the opportunity of changing or adding to their responses.

Interviews

Interviews were the primary mode of data collection because they enable engaging participants in conversations to capture their perspectives (Merriam, 2009). I designed the interview protocol for principals--not to provide the answers I wanted to hear--but to obtain responses that were relevant to answering the research questions (Yin, 2011). The data collection methods included semistructured face-to-face interviews designed to gain understanding of the reasons they attributed to student failure on the

SSCE, the significance they place on the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement, and how they influence school climate and teacher's expectations and approaches as their schools prepare students for the exam. The semistructured interview format followed a detail-oriented probe approach by asking participants follow-up questions to explain what they said to further investigate their comments for clarity of meaning or to seek additional information on issues related to the research questions (Moustakas, 1994).

According to Patton (2002), "Detail-oriented probes are the basic 'who,' what,' 'when,' and 'how' questions that are used to obtain a complete detailed picture of some activity or experience" (p. 373). According to Merriam (2009), semistructured interviews include a series of open-ended questions based on the topic under study. Open-ended questions define the topic yet allow opportunities for both the researcher and the participants to discuss topics in more detail. Furthermore, semistructured questions give researchers the freedom to probe to seek responses that are more elaborate or to follow a line of inquiry introduced by the interviewee.

The interview protocol for the initial interview contained questions that provided answers to the research questions. The interview began with background questions about participants' years of experience in education to help me see a participant in relation to other participants (Patton, 2002). Next, descriptive questions were designed to encourage participants to provide detailed information about their perceptions when their schools are preparing students for SSCE (see Appendix A). Interview questions were designed to elicit answers to specific RQs. Interview Questions 1 through 3 provided answers to

RQ1. Interview Questions 4 through 6 provided answers to RQ2. Interview Questions 7 through 11 provided answers to RQ3, while focus group interviews with lead teachers and document reviews provided additional answers to RQ3 (See Appendices A and B). Data from the interviews provided rich descriptions and revealed how participants understood common perceptions (Stake, 1995).

I conducted the interviews in English and audiotaped them with the consent of each participant (Moustakas, 1994). Each interview session took from 28 to 44 minutes and began with a brief explanation of the purpose of the study and assurance of the confidentiality of their identities and all information they provide (Patton, 2002).

Interviews were in the schools where the principals work both for their convenience and confidentiality (Patton, 2002). Each principal determined the specific interview date and time and the six interviews were concluded within 4 weeks. All communication devices were turned off (Yin, 2011), and recording equipment was checked to ensure effective functioning before and after each interview. Spare batteries and an additional recorder were on hand in case of primary equipment failure. I concluded each interview with a summary of the information gathered, an expression of my appreciation, and a request that they might be contacted for further information and later member checking (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Because of the possibility of issues requiring clarification coming up after document review, Seidman (2006) suggested initial and follow-up interviews should take place during a separate 90-minute meeting within 3 weeks. Therefore, I scheduled a

follow-up with each to clarify any responses from document reviews. Questions for a follow-up interview were open-ended to allow participants to share any information they deemed relevant.

Member checking was employed to ensure the accuracy of my perceptions. The member checking approach allowed participants to review their comments and my data analysis and approve of the ideas and language used to describe their perceptions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Participant interview question responses were summarized and sent to each participant via e-mail for verification. Pseudonyms replaced interviewees' names, and participants were promised they would see the results of data analysis before any publication (Stake, 1995). Audiotapes and transcriptions are secured in a safe place only I have access to and will be destroyed no sooner than 5 years after the study.

Focus Group Interviews

According to Patton (1990), focus group research involves a homogenous group interview with six to 10 people that allows a researcher to gain several perspectives on the same topic in a relatively short time. The focus group interview was chosen as the best method for gathering information from participants who had observations to add to an understanding of their principal's leadership practices (Patton). Furthermore, focus group interviews provide an opportunity to hear teachers' beliefs about how they perceive their principals' leadership style and practices, the impact the principal has on the school climate, and their expectations and practices as students prepare for the SSCE.

I arrived at each school for the interviews 30 minutes early to check recording equipment and to see if arrangements had been made to conduct the interviews without distractions or interruption. Interviews with the lead teachers at each school were conducted within 4 weeks. The focus group interviews with lead teachers lasted for 28–40 minutes during teachers' free time so they did not wait after school, and instruction was not interrupted. The focus group participants selected their location and told me the location through e-mail before the day of the interview.

I began each session with a detailed explanation of the interview protocol and answered participants' questions. Next, I moderated the interview session to ensure that each question was accurately presented and encouraged participants to engage in high quality dialogue about each topic. Focus group questions were grouped to answer RQ3 (see Appendix B). Finally, I closed the session with a summary of the information gathered, thanked the participants for attending, and adjourned the session (Patton, 2002).

I conducted a pilot study to evaluate the quality of the interview and focus group questions to refine the flow as necessary. I adapted changes as needed for the interview and focus group protocols for use in the actual research study (Yin, 2011). I interviewed two principals and conducted one focus group interview with eight lead teachers at one school for 45 to 55 minutes each. The pilot study was conducted within 1 week. Participants in the pilot study were recruited from a different city by e-mails requesting their participation (Appendices G and H). Face-to-face pilot interviews with principals were conducted at their respective schools. The focus group pilot interview with lead

teachers occurred at the first school I visited, where the principal was interviewed. After the pilot interviews, participants were asked to comment on the quality of the study related to the flow and consistency of the questions. The consent letter clearly stated that the focus of the pilot study was to refine the sequence of the interview questions to enable me to achieve a comfortable routine, to consider suggestions from the focus group, and to adapt the resulting protocols for the actual study (Yin).

A consent form to sign and attach to their confirmation e-mails was sent to interested participants. The pilot study was conducted within 1 week of receipt of those signed agreements, and participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. I transcribed interviews with principals and focus groups and saved transcriptions in a password-protected file on a removable hard drive. I reviewed participants' comments on the flow of the interview and focus group questions and the quality of the questions as they related to the purpose of the study. I then made necessary adjustments and sent letters of appreciation to participants at the end of the pilot study. Findings from the pilot study were the basis for the development of the final interview and focus group questions and protocols for the study.

Document Reviews

In addition to interviews, archival data was a supplementary source of information for verifying and cross checking interview data (Patton, 2002). I reviewed documents to evaluate the pertinence of the data collection strategy and to determine if there were other plausible sources of information. Records provided useful information, as they are

primary sources of information used in assessment that are constrained by time and assets. The review of documents such as school policy statements, announcements, minutes of meetings, and school logbook, SSCE spreadsheet for the past 2 years, and organizational charts were used to assess the values of participants and gain an understanding of that setting (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Document reviews and triangulation provided additional material for RQ3. In addition, it helped me to identify similarities and differences between stated policies and actual programs (Patton, 2002). I extracted descriptive data from documents such as high school goal statements, analyses of assessment performance, organizational structure, job descriptions, deliberations, and announcements. The purpose of the document review was to gain a better contextualized understanding of how the interview statements and school documents interacted with the realities of practice in student preparation for the SSCE.

I sought the approval of the respective principals to review the SSCE WAEC computer sheets for the past 2 years and other school documents such as policy manuals, announcements, minutes of meetings, and logs as part of the data collection. I reviewed the documents before leaving each school. The WAEC releases school copies of student SSCE results to individual schools in Microsoft (MS) Excel spreadsheet form. These spreadsheets are the authentic performance reports of students for each year and cannot be manipulated by individual schools due to verification access to the school's access code number on the WAEC official website. The school's SSCE spreadsheets for the last 2 years, policy statements, school logbook, announcements, and minutes books were

accessed with participants' consent. This information helped me answer RQ3 because supporting data from documents provided a background to help explain the perceptions of participants as well as verify particular details that participants supplied during the interviews (Patton, 2002).

Data-Analysis Plan

Analysis and data collection are not separate procedures in a qualitative research design. Rather, they are integrated processes, wherein feedback from respondents allows a researcher to gain a deepened understanding of the issue being studied while learning the meanings and interpretations that participants associate with their perceptions of an issue (Merriam, 1998). Interview questions are designed to provide answers to specific research questions, and I conducted and transcribed all interviews in English for ease of analysis and outside reviews. I reviewed discrepant cases that may have emerged to confirm or disconfirm the data. This review helped to generate an alternative explanation that might be integrated into the analysis. I applied Yin's (2009) method of data analysis because data were gathered primarily from participants' perspectives. Each participant was asked the same interview questions (see Appendices A and B). As applied to this study, intentions to build and sustain a school climate that supports student performance on the SSCE was measured by principals' interest in, knowledge of, and perceptions of the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement. Since a person's intent to support or become actively involved in a program may be predicted by analyzing his or her beliefs

about the relevance of the program (Jacobs-Pollez, 2012), I used this proposition to focus my data collection and analysis.

I employed a cross-case synthesis technique by considering each campus case separately for analysis using Yin's (2011) five-phase cycle that comprises compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. Atlas.ti software was used to aid in the analysis process. Data analysis was presented in detailed description of categories. I matched categories to construct possible patterns and make deductions, assertions, and conclusions based on data (Stake, 1995). Immediately after each interview, the digital recordings were transcribed and reviewed. Notes for each participant were made from the reviews and saved on a password-protected file on a flash drive. I read the interview transcripts and documents and made reflective notes on ideas and key concepts that emerged until the point of saturation when nothing new was revealed, using unique initial codes I developed for categories. These categories were applied to the RQ to help me understand how people's intentions to become actively involved in a program may be predicted by analyzing their beliefs about the relevance of that program (Yin, 2011).

The third phase was reassembling data to identify emerging patterns by tabulating emerging themes and theoretical concepts. Emerging themes were interpreted for deductions and conclusions. This level was completed using detailed descriptions of the context and facts presented by the data. An interpretation of participants' concepts identified single instances, although individual cases were categorized to create themes.

A cross-case synthesis strategy was employed to compare and contrast the categories in all six cases to help establish instances of general practices that occur across different cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2009).

In the fourth phase, Yin (2011) recommends ensuring that the interpretation of data is based on “completeness, fairness, empirical accuracy, value-added, and credibility” (p. 207). I interpreted all transcripts and conducted respondent feedback on all generated data (Yin, 2009). The next phase was considering the conclusions that comprised the academic and practical implications of this multiple case study and an explanation of the significance of the study (Yin).

Data were presented to demonstrate transparent analysis and address the criticism of qualitative research by using a two-dimensional model for document category development to enhance the analysis (Constas, 1992). This model accounts for the category sources, the basis for justifying a category, and detailed the different stages of the research process. Although the case study design has a flexible reporting format, detailed descriptions, including participant interpretations and direct quotations, were used in presenting data (Yin, 2011). According to Merriam (1998), this further helped to enhance the balance between background information, interpretations, analysis, and discussions. I read the documents such as policy statements, announcements, logbook, and minutes of meetings to develop a perspective of how these Nigerian high school principals influence school climate and teachers’ expectations and approaches. Open coding and axial coding were used to analyze document contents (Corbin & Strauss,

2008). Themes that emerged were used to compare and contrast the themes drawn from interviews.

In addition, I analyzed the interviews and documents using Atlas.ti software to enhance storing, coding, and data retrieval (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The software program also enabled objective coding of themes. Atlas.ti is a highly interactive tool that uses an externally assigned database of files that allows documents, quotations, codes, and memos to be created, assigned, and managed (Gibbs, 2007). It supports both textual and multimedia data (Gibbs). I could navigate and manipulate data throughout the analytic process and had an overview of the coding process due to data proximity because the highlighted codes and the text segment codes were displayed for editing. Data were organized into subsets, imported, and retrieved in several ways, as that provided flexibility

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Qualitative case study research demonstrates credibility when it is aligned with the stated purpose of reporting the perspectives of participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Trochim, 2001). Therefore, I ensured that the results were consistent with the perspectives of participants. I addressed issues of trustworthiness by ensuring that the participants had experience administering the SSCE so that the information collected during the interviews would be relevant, valid, and productive (Stake, 1995). The participants' credibility as experienced principals was vital to the trustworthiness of the

data. Member checking was also employed to ensure the correct interpretation of the content of the interviews. The member checking approach gave participants a chance to review a summary of their responses and language in describing their perceptions (Stake). Participant interview responses were summarized and sent to participants for verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In addition, to ensure confidentiality, a clear and simple filing system was used to save individual interview transcripts separately in MS Word documents with pseudonyms for the interviewer and interviewee's identities as the file names. Saved files were backed up on external hard drives and flash drives and stored in a different location (Patton, 2002).

Transferability

Transferability is an assessment of the extent to which research findings can be applied beyond the limits of a study. I sampled participants from different school types to enrich details of the case study to demonstrate transferability. The outcome of my research findings, its acceptability in shaping educational policy, and its impact on positive change depended on my ability to control bias (Maxwell, 2013). This understanding required that I bracket my personal experiences as the principal of a high school by maintaining reflective notes of my thoughts and being aware of my biases.

Dependability

I ensured dependability by triangulating the research findings from the different data sources (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), as data convergence enhanced the validity and reliability of the study (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010). Moreover, dependability

was also an objective of the data and analysis. For dependability, the research methods, context, and participant information were described in detail to assist future researchers who might wish to repeat the work and assess the extent to which appropriate research practices were followed.

Confirmability

I established conformability through an audit trail to maintain evidence of data verification (Yin, 2011). The findings were confirmed using interpretations from the different participants' categories, as the views of participants had been aligned with preliminary findings. The transcribed texts from the interviews are retrievable and available upon request to other researchers who might be interested in furthering the study. In addition, the use of rich and thick descriptions of analysis enhanced understanding and supported transferability (Patton, 2002).

I further ensured trustworthiness through the review of policy statements, announcements, logbooks, SSCE spreadsheets, organizational chart, and minutes of meetings, as these provided a background that helped explain the perceptions of participants as well as verify particular details that participants have supplied (Patton, 2002). In addition, Patton (2002) further stated:

The ideal situation would include access to all routine records on clients, all correspondence from and to program staff . . . organizational rules, regulations, memoranda, charts, and any other official or unofficial documents generated by or for the program. (p. 293).

Ethical Procedures

Requires engaging voluntary participation, and assuring that no participant be subject to threats or have their wellbeing compromised. Other safeguards to protect the rights of participants and ensure their safety were that informed consent and anonymity were assured and names and other identifying characteristics were kept confidential and did not appear on any documents. Research-related records and data are in secure locations accessible only to me (Patton, 2002).

I obtained approval from the Walden University IRB before conducting the interviews. This approval supported the participants' assurance that they can make informed decisions. The participant's consent form explained that participation was voluntary and that there is no penalty for deciding to drop out of the study. I requested the permission of the respective principals to access the school's WAEC computer spreadsheets for the past two years for analysis. Audiotapes were kept in a locked file until transcribed, will be destroyed 5 years after transcription, and transcriptions saved on a password-protected computer to further ensure data security. Interviews were coded for anonymity. The codes and demographic data are in a locked file, separate from the transcriptions. No personal and identifiable data will be part of any publication of the results of the study, and pseudonyms have replaced participants' names. Information about data management was presented to all interview participants before the interview, and a summary of the analysis was provided to them before the dissertation is included in ProQuest.

Confidentiality is essential when accessing official documents for research (Patton, 2002). For this study, I reviewed documents such as SSCE spreadsheets for the past 2 years, logbooks, and policy statements. These documents required the permission of the principals before they could be released for review and analysis. Therefore, I assured participants of the confidentiality of data in a formal request to access these documents for use on the school premises during the consent signing stage.

No principal that I maintain a personal relationship with participated in the interviews. Yin (2011) asserted that a researcher should bracket out personal experiences related to any study as much as possible. Bracketing my experiences helped me maintain neutrality, and I conducted interviews without any attempt to influence participant responses. Participants were encouraged to respond openly and honestly without concern about potential power conflict or manipulation. Yin (2011) suggested that a researcher collaboratively “empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power of relationships that exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (p. 48). I followed this suggestion.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the RQs, research design, rationale for participant selection, data collection, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. The reciprocal relationship between the study purpose and the RQs enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings (Patton, 2002). The sample was six high school principals

and eight lead teachers in each school. A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify participants.

I followed a qualitative approach to answer the RQs using a case study method. This case study included data collection and analysis procedures that protected human subjects and ensured validity and reliability. The data collection methods included semistructured face-to-face interviews designed to gain understanding of how Nigerian principals influence school climate and teachers' expectations and approaches as their schools prepare students for the SSCE. The primary method used was typology analysis, wherein transcribed data were coded and categorized under themes. I used hand coding as well as Atlas.ti software for this purpose. Rich descriptions of the perceptions I gathered provided more insight into the issue.

Safe and ethical processes were also followed throughout the research, particularly as my research is based on the inductive process. The participants were ensured to be physically and psychologically safe, and I ensured privacy and confidentiality in handling primary data during and after the research project. In Chapter 4, I will present the research findings from the data analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this multiple case study was to understand principals' perceptions of student performance on the SSCE and their influence on school climate and teacher expectations and approaches, particularly as their schools prepare students for the exam. I conducted this study in a city in the southern part of Nigeria with a history of poor student performance on the SSCE. The problem addressed in this study was that between 2009 and 2015 over 75% of high school students in Nigeria failed to pass the SSCE that confirms their readiness for college.

The failure of most students in Nigeria to pass the SSCE has been partially attributed by research to poor school climate. However, strong principal leadership may enable schools to harness some of their resources and capabilities effectively to create a positive school climate. For example, a positive school climate positively influences teachers' expectations and approaches and subsequently promotes positive student performance. There was a gap in the knowledge of principals' perceptions towards student performance on the SSCE, and research has suggested poor academic achievement is partly attributed to lack of strong principal leadership in schools. Therefore, it was important to learn principals' perceptions of student performance on the SSCE. Consequently, the RQs that guided this multiple case study were as follows:

RQ1: What reasons do Nigerian high school principals attribute to student failure on the SSCE?

RQ2: What significance do Nigerian high school principals place on the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement?

RQ3: How do Nigerian high school principals influence school climate and teacher expectations and approaches as their schools prepare students for the SSCE?

In this chapter, I will present my analysis of the data and the answers to the RQs as well as provide a detailed account of the perceptions of principals of student performance on the SSCE. This account will include my use of an open process of data analysis. In addition, the chapter will include a description of the findings from the pilot project; details on how data were collected, analyzed, and validated; research findings; and answers to the RQs. The chapter will conclude with a transition to Chapter 5 where I will review the results in relation to the literature in Chapter 2.

Pilot Study

I conducted the pilot study to test and model the interview protocol for the main study. After receiving IRB approval, I invited and obtained the consent of two principals and eight lead teachers in a different city from where the main study was conducted to participate in the pilot study by being interviewed. I scheduled the pilot interview date, time, and venue with the interested participants. For the pilot study, I tested two different interview protocols. The first protocol was for school principals (see Appendix A) and the second, for lead teachers (see Appendix B). Two principals were interviewed at their respective schools, with each interview lasting 60 minutes. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. I conducted a 55-minute focus group interview with

eight lead teachers, at the first school where the principal was interviewed. Focus group participants were also assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. I used my iPad and mobile phone for backup recording of all the interviews. Participants all answered their questions and commented positively on the flow and consistency of the interview questions.

After the pilot study, participants responded that they were satisfied with the interview protocol and suggested I use the interview protocol as a guide. I transcribed the pilot interviews and saved them in a password-protected file on a hard drive. The result from the pilot study analysis did not require that the interview protocol or analysis strategies be altered. I considered the comments made by the pilot study participants in my preparation towards conducting the main interviews and used the interview protocols as a guide in the main study.

Research Setting

This multiple case study involved collecting data through face-to-face semistructured interviews. The interview participants were from different schools representing all school types. During the data collection phase of this study, Grade 12 students were testing for the SSCE organized by the WAEC. No known personal or organizational conditions with participants at the time of the study affected the interpretation of the study results.

Demographics

The southern part of Nigeria is strategically located in a region that is the main economic base of the country (Ikelegbe, 2005). In addition to oil and gas, the region contributes other major resources that attract huge investment opportunities (Ikelegbe). Data from schools in this area showed an increase in the failure rate on the 2014 SSCE compared to 53% in 2013 (WAEC, 2014). Failure of over half of the students is a cause for concern (Emiloju & Adeyoju, 2012). Participants were six high school principals and 48 lead teachers from state, federal and private schools in this region. African Americans and British comprise only 1% of the private school enrollment. A distribution of the study participants by category is presented in Table 1, showing equal selection of participants for each category across all school types.

Table 1

Demographic Distribution of Participants

School	A	B	C	D	E	F	Totals
Principals	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
*Teachers	8	8	8	8	8	8	48
Totals	9	9	9	9	9	9	54

Note. *Number of lead teachers in each school that participated.

Table 2

Distribution of Participants by School Type and SSCE

School	A	B	C	D	E	F
School type	Public	Public	Private	Private	Federal	Federal
SSCE scores	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High

Note. SSCE is student performance level on the SSCE. High means a school's percentage credit pass on the SSCE is 80% and above. Low indicates consistent failure.

Participants were from high schools in urban communities. Schools A and B were public, serving over 1,500 students each; Schools C and D were private, serving under 1,000 high school students each; while Schools E and F were federal, serving over 1,500 students each. Schools differed by enrollment and demographic composition of the student population.

Data Collection

Data collection began after I received Walden University IRB approval to conduct research. I employed multiple sources of data collection related to principals' perceptions, such as face-to-face interviews, focus group interviews, and document reviews to enable me to triangulate data about perceptions of student SSCE performance. I carefully followed the data collection sequence described in Chapter 3. I visited the director of high schools to obtain letters of cooperation to collect data (see Appendix C), contact potential participants, and develop a mailing list of principals who had more than 2 years of SSCE administration experience in the city.

I conducted face-to-face interviews with the principals at their respective schools from May 7–June 30, 2016, for 28–44 minutes each after agreeing that personal visits were the best way to contact lead teachers. The 2016 SSCE administration was already in progress, and teachers were engaged in regular lessons. Some principals provided a list of all the teachers and the number of their years of service in the school.

After this meeting, I sorted out the lead teachers who had a minimum of 2 years teaching under their current principal. In a consent form I delivered personally, I requested the voluntary participation of eight lead teachers per school to give them all a random chance to participate. Information about the purpose and focus of the study and the estimated interview time and confidentiality required of participants was included on the consent form. I interviewed 54 participants at their school campuses: six principals and 48 lead teachers (see Table 1).

I conducted interviews in the school library, conference room, or classroom of teacher participants for 30–45 minutes each and with principals for 28–44 minutes each. I had a follow-up interview lasting 15–20 minutes with each of the principals. I used this opportunity to clarify information from initial interviews and document reviews. The abbreviated interviews did not infringe upon my collecting deep and rich data from the participants. There were no difficulties encountered during data collection. I used my iPad and mobile phone for backup recording of interviews and maintained the protocol described in Chapter 3 for minimizing risk and protecting participant identities. Participants were given pseudonyms linked to systematic codes used to label the

interviews and downloaded in MP3 file format on a removable disk drive for storage in a locked safe in my home office. I sent copies of the interview transcripts to participants for their review and comments before I analyzed the data. During and after the interviews, I verified some of the interview data by requesting documentary evidence from principals (see Appendices D to F). Participants were given a letter of appreciation following the research (see Appendix G).

Data Analysis

In this section, I will present individual school case studies for the analysis of the results. In the following paragraphs, I will describe the coding process; how the codes, subthemes, and themes emerged; and the qualities of discrepant cases that emerged and were integrated into the analysis to create codes, subthemes, and themes. Data from each school were first transcribed and analyzed in a five-phase cycle described in the previous chapter (Yin, 2011). Interview transcripts were loaded in Atlas.ti computer software to supplement the analysis.

The data for each school were compiled, disassembled, reassembled, and arrayed separately. I listened to the recorded interviews several times and transcribed them into scripts for clarity and to identify themes and establish patterns among themes and subthemes (Stake, 1995). The initial codes I developed when the data were disassembled were recombined using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to identify emerging patterns and to note the resulting themes (Yin, 2011).

During the compilation, I transcribed the recorded interviews and then downloaded the digital files of the recorded interviews in MP3 file format and saved the material on password-protected computer files organized by school type. I reviewed the interview transcripts, paying special attention to potentially significant terms and words as an active and interactive process for deeper understanding and meaning of the data (Stake, 1995). The transcribed files in MS Word format were renamed, password protected, and backed up onto a removable hard drive for safekeeping.

I then reviewed and compiled the interview transcript from each school on separate password-protected spreadsheets and saved them on a removable hard drive. I read the transcripts, made memos, and assigned code-specific lines on the margins of the transcripts. I used two methods to assign the codes. If the word “distractions” was used in a sentence on the fourth line of the transcript, I would code “distractions” in the margin next to the fourth line. The second method was to code the data to reflect the essence of the respondent’s statements with a sentence or paragraph. For instance, when the respondent described the level of student distractions when preparing for the SSCE in four sentences on the sixth to ninth lines on the transcript, I assigned two codes: “distractions” and “student.” The former code (distractions) reflected the rule used in the first instance, and the latter code (student) reflected the point the respondent was trying to establish. These code assignments are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Code Assignments on Excel Spreadsheet

Cell C	Cell D	Cell E	Cell F
Subthemes	Codes	Participant comment	Page
Undisciplined	Distractions	Lack of seriousness of most students	SB1P
	Discipline	Number one is discipline because you cannot train the person who is not disciplined	SD1P
	Lack of seriousness	Some students may not be very serious. They don't know why they are in school. They need to be pushed around.	SF1P
Reading culture		Students generally lack this reading culture	SE1P
Personality issues	Recognition	Every child in the senior secondary school is an adolescent. If you talk them down, they walk out on you. If you flog them, it's going to be worse.	SA1P

Note. Codes represent related or key words extracted from responses before assigning subthemes. Actual comment is exactly what respondents said, and page number refers the page on the transcript described using code for respondent's pseudonym and page number. Grouping of subthemes into themes progressed to the left columns of the spreadsheet.

As summarized in Table 3, I worked on the cells of the Excel spreadsheet starting from the right to the left side. For example, I extracted the sentence and the transcript page numbers from where the code "distraction" emerged and placed it on Cells E and F respectively. The code "distraction" was placed on row three of Cell D. The exact sentences reflecting the codes and the page numbers on the transcript were extracted and placed on an Excel spreadsheet to keep track of the subthemes and themes that would emerge. The codes were reassembled into subthemes by grouping the emerging categories into the left side column of the codes on the spreadsheet. Therefore, using the

example about the code distraction, I created a subtheme in Column C called “undisciplined,” because I had identified other codes such as “lacking in discipline” and “lack of seriousness” that suggested the perception of poor discipline. The themes assignments of the analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Theme Assignments of Excel Spreadsheet

Cell B Themes	Cell C Subthemes	Cell D Codes	Cell E Participant comment	Cell F P. no.
Student-related issues	Undisciplined	Distractions	Lack of seriousness of most students	SB1P
		Discipline	Number one is discipline because you cannot train the person who is not disciplined	SD1P
		Lack of seriousness	For students, some of them may not be very serious. They don't know why they are in school. They need to be pushed around.	SF1P
	Poor reading culture		Students generally lack this reading culture	SE1P
	Personality issues	Recognition	Every child in the senior secondary school is an adolescent. If you talk them down to them, they walk out on you; if you flog them, it's going to be worse.	SA1P

Note. A new theme called “student-related issues” was created to encompass discipline, poor reading culture, and personality issues. Grouping of subthemes into broader themes progressed to the left column of the spreadsheet.

The resulting subthemes were reassembled into themes as shown in Table 4 by grouping the emerging subthemes into the left column of the spreadsheet. Therefore,

using the example on subtheme “undisciplined,” I created a theme in Column B called “student-related issues” because I had identified other subthemes “reading culture” that described some respondents’ concerns before the SSCE examination. This regrouping of subthemes reduced the categories to a manageable number, and I ended the individual school analysis when I identified the themes. The cross case analysis of the themes is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Cross-Case Analysis Between High- and Low-Performing Schools

Cross-case analysis	High-performing schools	Low-performing schools
Student-related issues	Indiscipline	Poor reading culture
Family and socioeconomic issues	Parental interference	Poverty
The educational system	Teacher behavior	Poor facilities and materials
Academic achievement	High SSCE significance	High SSCE significance
Building viable schools	Effect of SSCE result	Effect of SSCE result
Guarded optimism about the validity of SSCE result		Examination malpractice
Addressing future challenges		
Academic intervention programs	Planned programs	
Collaboration,	Stakeholders involvement	
Parental involvement	High involvement	Low involvement
Perceptive leadership	Diverse leadership styles	
Leveraging competent teachers	Professional development	
Effective strategies	Instructional leader	Managerial leader
Continues school improvement plans	Developed improvement plan	No improvement plan

Note. Cross-case analysis results are to the right column of the resulting case analyses of the high and low performing schools.

I reassembled the codes by grouping duplicate codes that emerged from other transcripts under a single code. Thus, I listed under the code “distraction” all the different sentences and page numbers from the different transcripts. For instance, I grouped all the data from about 54 respondents that were related to the code “distraction” by listing the exact sentences and page numbers.

All page numbers were formatted by using the letter of the pseudonym and the page number. Therefore, when the pseudonym for the respondent was “School A,” then the page number “SA1P” was used to represent page one on the School A transcript for the principal. This format enabled me to identify both the page number and the specific transcript since each school had both principal and focus group respondents. The process of reading, writing, and coding was iterative. I continued the process of grouping the codes by repeatedly reading the data to identify new insights until the point of saturation. Subsequently, I regrouped the codes by combining closely related codes to form themes (Merriam, 1998).

High performing school principals linked different resources, students, teachers, parents, and a culture of continuous improvement to either directly or indirectly enhance student performance on the SSCE. The high performing school principals applied varying strategies and encouraged flexible leadership styles at their schools to create an environment conducive to learning. However, some strategies did not benefit poor-performing students by providing an alternative track to resolve the needs identified through data analysis.

In addition, the performance improvement culture was supported by recruiting experienced teachers in some schools, providing diverse resources, and encouraging knowledge sharing. However, teachers, especially from the public high school, had concerns about the future because of the challenge of bureaucracy in providing instructional materials and the professional development in their schools by the Ministry of Education. The underlying factor that has kept principals, teachers, and students in the southern part of the country to consistently enhance student performance on the SSCE is their commitment to surmounting current challenges.

I compared the findings from the different cases on the schools to find concepts that were commonly applied throughout the schools. I analyzed each school case study separately prior to beginning the cross-case analysis, I used a tabular format (see Table 5), to list and make comparisons between the resulting themes from the individual case analysis for the schools. This analysis facilitated the identification of the perceptions and practices that were common to all principals and schools.

Detailed Summary of Cross-Case Analysis of Results

Table 6 provides a detailed summary of findings from the case analysis of the different school types. Note that each theme presented in this section can be cross-referenced with the themes that emerged that are shown in Table 5.

Table 6

Cross-Case Analysis of Schools

Cross-case analysis	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F
Student-related issues	Blamed students in some way	Blamed students in some way	Blamed students in some way	Blamed students in some way	Blamed students in some way	Blamed students in some way
Family's socio-economic status	Low	Low	High	High	Mixed	Mixed
Education system facilities and resources	not readily available	not readily available	available		some resources available	some resources available
Academic achievement	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Building viable schools	Not viable	SSCE result attracts prospective parents	Recruiting and training highly competent teachers	Recruiting and training highly competent teachers	Recruiting and training competent teachers	Recruiting and training competent teachers
Guarded optimism about validity of SSCE results	Allows exam malpractice	No tolerance of exam malpractice	No tolerance of exam malpractice	No tolerance of exam malpractice	No tolerance for exam malpractice	No tolerance for exam malpractice
Addressing future challenges	Exam malpractice and teacher motivation	Exam malpractice	Exam malpractice	Exam malpractice	Exam malpractice and teacher motivation	Exam malpractice
Academic intervention program	Applying effective strategies	Linking teachers with available resources	Applying highly effective strategies	Linking teachers with available resources	Applying highly effective strategies	Linking teachers with available resources
Collaboration	Low	High	Moderate	High	Moderate	High
Parental involvement	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High

Perceptive leadership in promoting positive school climate	Not intentional	Intentional	Not intentional	Intentional	Not intentional	Intentional
Strategies	Not effective	Effective	Not highly effective	Highly effective	Not highly effective	Highly effective
Continuous school improvement plans	Does not exist	Skeletal	Does not exist	Developed	In progress	Developed
Leveraging competent teachers	Minimal training	Professional development	Minimal training	Professional development	Minimal training	Professional development

Note. *SSCE Level reflects student performance levels on the SSCE. High represents a school's performance above average. Low represents a school's performance below average.

The themes in the cross-case analysis revealed strategies applied at the schools. However, their differences occurred at the level of detail because principals and teachers used different techniques to implement the strategies using the platforms and resources provided by their respective school boards. For instance, principals in high performing schools see great potential in using the SSCE result for an analysis of their programs and to make systemic changes. They believe that data from the examination can help them to tailor their curricula to the needs of all their students. Further differences between high- and poor-performing schools were related to program specifics. The high-performing schools had programs that focused on students.

Fourteen principals' practices emerged from the cross-case analysis; however, implementing highly effective strategies such as building viable schools, guarded optimism about the validity of SSCE results, principal as leader, academic intervention

programs, effective strategies, and continued school improvement plans had dominant roles. These themes suggested how some school principals and teachers promoted collaboration when preparing students for the SSCE. The principals, in collaboration with teachers, used both different strategies and existing systems and structures to prepare students for the SSCE. To mitigate the effects of ongoing examination malpractice, the principals of the schools expressed guarded optimism about the validity of the SSCE result from some schools and concerns about future performance.

Discrepant Cases

I observed discrepant cases in the data and the themes that emerged. I reviewed the data repeatedly and discovered the discrepancy emanated from participants' responses to the interview questions. During the interviews, I guided the respondents with minimal interruptions to enable them to express themselves. Consequently, respondents expressed guarded optimism about principals' perceptions of student performance on the SSCE and concerns about improving performance. However, I did not expunge the data because the emerging themes from codes such as "lack of reading culture," "distractions," and "lack of seriousness" resulted in themes such as "undisciplined" and "poor reading culture," both of which directly affect performance on the SSCE. Therefore, themes that emerged from the discrepant cases were accounted for by the theme "addressing future challenges."

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

To ensure credibility, I (a) conducted pilot interviews to test the interview protocol as described in the section for pilot study in Chapter 3, (b) ensured that participants had experience administering the SSCE, (c) maintained a balance between the need for a sample size large enough for the purpose of credibility yet small enough to provide details for each unit of analysis (Patton, 1987), and (d) used a clear filing system to save individual interview transcripts separately in Microsoft Word documents with pseudonyms for the interviewer and interviewee's file names. Saved files were backed up on external hard drives and flash drives and stored in a locked safe in my office. I further ensured that the results represented the perspectives of participants by sharing their interview transcripts and findings with them to confirm or disconfirm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Trochim, 2001).

Transferability

Transferability was enhanced by sampling participants of different school backgrounds such as principals and lead teachers from federal, state, and private schools. Additionally, I described the research context of this study in detail. I also included assumptions that were central to this research.

Dependability

Using an interview guide was appropriate because the study was conducted when students were undergoing SSCE testing. Thus, participants' experiences preparing

students for the SSCE were fresh in their minds in relation to the research goals. The research methods, context, and participant information are described in detail to assist future researchers who wish to repeat the work and assess the extent to which appropriate research practices have been followed. Finally, I triangulated the data collected with perceptions from different participants and document reviews.

Confirmability

To ensure that the data collected could support the findings of this research, I meticulously documented all procedures to encourage the collaboration needed to confirm the study results (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Trochim, 2001). I also described the procedures undertaken in Chapters 3 and 4. To stay on schedule, I kept a logbook of all appointments during data collection and analysis. The names used that follow are pseudonyms for principals who participated in the study.

Study Results

Research Question 1 (RQ1)

I focused on principals' views on school failure in the first research question. What reasons do Nigerian high school principals attribute to student failure on the SSCE? Pseudonyms are used instead of participants' names. The result of my analysis are reflected in the subsequent sections.

High School A. The perception of the participant with the pseudonym of Oluchi perceived the reasons students fail the SSCE are the result of several factors: family background, poor reading culture, poverty, lack of self-confidence, and inadequate school

facilities. Oluchi believes every child is intelligent. However, when a child lacks academic support at home, learning becomes a challenge. Public schools serve students from low socioeconomic status. Most of these children are raised as domestic workers in other families where they are expected to be highly involved in household chores and attend school as a reward for their services.

The cumulative effects of being poor, stated Oluchi, has an effect on the academic performance of high school students. The lack of basic resources to help children study at home such as a study room and textbooks has a direct impact on their motivation to learn. Students from low socioeconomic status cannot afford basic learning resources. Therefore, they have poor grades on the SSCE. The structural forces and stigma of being poor shape how students see themselves in a school where such resources such as a library, laboratory, and application of technology cannot be provided. Oluchi stated:

Poor performance is also a result of lack of support back home. There is nobody edifying the students at home. When students return home from school, normally they should be asked what they studied for the day. They must be supported from the homes so that when they come back to the school, the teachers will continue. . . . Poverty also propels some 12th grade students not to develop good reading culture.

Oluchi believes high school students associate themselves with groups because of the influence of their poor neighborhoods. The communities where predominantly public school students dwell expose them to habits such as poor reading culture that negatively

affects their academic performance. In Oluchi's words, "The people not helping us are parents because they push their children to us."

While Oluchi's school does not have a specific program to combat the high failure rate, 12th grade students occasionally remain behind for extra afterschool lessons with a few teachers. Oluchi encourages all students to take advantage of the extra help. He believes that when teachers spend more time with students, it has a positive effect on their achievement.

Although Oluchi's attributes of sympathy is acknowledged and admired, however, Oluchi had not harnessed these attributes to improve student performance. Despite Oluchi's genuine personal efforts to improve the low academic performance, Oluchi failed to exert the required leadership in managing School A considering the challenges posed to effective teaching and learning at the school such as teacher unprofessional conduct, student indiscipline, and lack of parental support. Students' low academic performance remained unresolved.

High School B. Miasi stated that there are variables outside the school sphere that affect academic achievement. Miasi perceived that student failure has its roots in the home. "They expect the government to do everything for them these days." Miasi stated, Many people think that all schools are the same, but they are very different with respect to parental involvement in matters that affect their child's education. Some parents purposely register their children in schools where they are allowed to engage in malpractice.

Miasi also observed that some public school students have their parents' support in withdrawing from a well-organized school where students write the SSCE following the examination policies designed to give all students equal opportunities to show their abilities. They then enroll in schools where they can engage in examination malpractice by (a) receiving answers from other students or external sources; (b) using an unauthorized testing aid, including [cell] phones; (c) taking the test for someone else; or (d) failing to follow testing procedures. Most often, these students have poor school attendance, extend vacations during holidays, and return to school unprepared. Miasi stated that the lack of right priorities by some parents results in students tracking below average performance.

Miasi observed that very few students arrive at school with their assignments completed. Due to the structural inequalities that exist in their homes, Miasi explained why so many students are academically behind and need remediation:

To get them to read is a challenge, and that is one of the reasons so many of them need extra help. Though schools are a place where students can learn, the family can be a barrier preventing them from graduating from high school with good grades. The prevailing poverty, poor health facilities, and failing schools contribute to the poor academic achievement on the SSCE.

Miasi perceived that her administration is having a positive effect on the academic success of her students, as they typically earn very good grades. However, Miasi had challenges common to most public schools in Nigeria, including lack of facilities.

Nonetheless, Miasi positively influenced teachers, students, and parents through dialogue and collaboration. To improve academic performance, Miasi and the teachers resolved to restore teacher professionalism and teachers' welfare support, reestablish student discipline, provide an academically challenging learning environment, and create school resources through community partnerships. The concerted and focused positive leadership initiatives and practices introduced by Miasi in form of discussions and supervision to improve student performance engendered and promoted certain values such as team spirit, dialogue, hard work, pride in their school, studiousness, and discipline.

High School C. According to principal Ebube, distractions impact the academic progress of 12th grade students on the SSCE. Ebube asserted:

Distraction is the reason students fail because at this stage a lot of things distract children. Internet is good, but it has its own disadvantages. . . . We give students take-home assignments during holiday, but we cannot follow them to their homes to know what is happening. Most of them use the Internet at home [for social networking] without doing their assignments. In our school, Internet use is controlled. Students are allowed to use the Internet [for an] assignment.

Ebube perceives access to electronic devices such as cell phones, laptops, and Internet access interrupts students' study habits. Ebube thinks students are no longer motivated to learn and that parental involvement is very low at the school. Parents only come to school when they are called to address behavioral issues. "Most often, mothers

are the ones that come to school to discuss behavioral and academic issues with school administration,” and that fathers tend not to participate in school functions. The principal observes that the older the students, the less parental involvement in school-related activities. The findings suggest that Ebube should learn how to clearly communicate, drive institutional goals, and develop the means for raising academic performance.

High School D: Amara noted that 12th grade students encounter many challenges and that peer influences and disobeying school rules have a direct effect on their academic identity and performance. However, Amara observed that the school is successful with 12th grade student performance on the SSCE as the school records improved student performance on the SSCE each year.

According to Amara:

This year the school has been rated as one of the best in the country. We have resources available, the teachers are well trained, and a good number of them teach different subjects. With that, we are able to get where we are today.

Teachers are re-trained on the job. We run training for our staff like the TKT examination for the Cambridge because we also teach Cambridge curriculum. We do re-training for teachers constantly almost every session.

This principal has the full support of the management board in providing resources and maintaining high student participation in decisions affecting students. In Amara’s opinion, creating a nurturing environment for both staff and students, through both discipline and proper guidance, can improve the academic performance of students.

Amara believes that although some students might be slow in comprehending the SSCE syllabus content, they can still succeed. Amara contended:

This year, the school recorded 99% credit pass on the SSCE, and 100% of the students went to college. It takes a lot of persistence, guidance, collaboration, planning, and meetings with families to ensure that every student graduates with at least the minimum grades required on the SSCE for university admission.

The data showed teachers, students, and principal were all motivated by a common purpose to which they, in diverse ways, exhibited some level of commitment, dedication and sacrifice. This common purpose was getting all students to be SSCE confident and ready. This was a practical way of maintaining their status as the top-achieving school in the state. The positive personality and exemplary conduct of Amara, were instrumental in the effective preparation of SSCE-ready and confident students.

The principal's instructional leadership and collegial leadership were all intended to prepare students to be confident and ready for the SSCE and pass with higher grades. All, including teachers and students, were concerned about maintaining good academic results. Consequently, teachers taught during extra-tutorials even at the time when there was no remuneration for that. They not only advised and encouraged students to behave well and to study hard but showed by example, through their own efforts to harness their talents in support of one another. The principal's good relationship with teachers, students, parents, and community seemed to have set the tone for an effective and cordial school environment that promoted teaching and learning.

High School E. Poor reading culture affects student academic performance, and Ngozi purports that the value students attach to reading academic material has a direct effect on their academic performance:

[Problems include] lack of seriousness on the part of majority of the students.

Students generally lack this reading culture. They prefer to jump around, especially girls, gossip, and do other things like that. We are channeling our efforts to make them study on their own.

Ngozi contended that friends also affect the academic achievement of students. While individual effort is important for individual success, for those who are interested in hanging out with friends, academic success is not promised. Ngozi observed that these students associate themselves with others in and outside the school to talk about things unrelated to their academic performance. Ngozi noted that parental involvement is lacking. The findings clearly indicated the need to include professional development for principals on effective strategies for improving academic performance when working to prepare students for the SSCE.

High School F. Dami perceived lack of specific career pathways as affecting student performance on the SSCE, as subject selection informs the academic identities of students. The principal stated that student attitudes and behaviors towards the subject selection have a direct impact on their academic failure or success in school. Throughout the interview, Dami affirmed that students enroll in certain subjects because of their parents, their peers in that class, and because some think enrolling in science course is

more prestigious. Dami observed that subject selection and career choice are misunderstood:

Parents try to pick a career for their children. This is very dangerous. The child should be allowed [to choose his or her own path], and as the child grows, you will see where the child has flair and let the child go toward that direction instead of pushing a particular discipline on the child.

Dami asserted that 12th grade students were the most likely to get into trouble when it comes to obeying school policies. Dami also noticed that 12th grade students were often perceived as threatening and associated with groups in and outside the school and therefore were under constant vigilance by the staff. Dami meets with the students to review their academic performance and behavior:

We have a counseling department [with] professional counselors who talk to [students] daily, but every teacher sees it as a point of duty even as they teach their classes of bringing in counseling issues because students have to know why they are in school. You teach students and tell them they are in school [primarily] for their future, and that [the] future begins now. These counseling sessions are helping the students to obey school policies, disassociate from wrong groups, and to [practice] good behavior.

The results showed that school principals knew why students perform poorly on the SSCE and try to improve student performance by (a) organizing extra lessons, (b) practicing materials containing question, (c) administrating mock examination, (d)

organizing counseling sessions, (e) and analyzing SSCE results. These practices were strongly influenced by a commitment on the part of some principals and teachers to meet the needs of students. Therefore, principals and teachers innovatively applied these practices to improve academic performance by working beyond the usual official hours. Additionally, some principals exhibited some leader perceptiveness when they identified the academic needs of the students and teachers and provided teachers with the available resources and facilitated knowledge sharing through meetings as a way of supporting them to achieve their goals.

Consequently, the principals allocate resources to teachers and determine the manner in which available resources should be shared. The leadership of principals contributed partly to some themes such as “guarded optimism about the validity of the SSCE results,” which described how (a) principals maintain a culture of supervision, (b) communicate teacher concerns with their respective boards, and (c) maintain a pool of experienced staff.

Research Question 2 (RQ2)

I focused on the significance and academic achievement in the research question. What significance do Nigerian high school principals place on the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement? The results of my analysis are reflected subsequent sections.

High School A. Oluchi noted that the SSCE qualifies a student to seek admission to universities or secure a job for those who cannot afford the financial demands of higher education. Oluchi believes that most students engage in examination malpractice

because of their desperation to obtain the qualifications for higher education. Oluchi believes more counselors be sent to schools to help meet the psychological needs of students. Oluchi stated:

The SSCE certificate is crucial. Every student wants to get it, and there is nothing you tell them about maintaining examination ethics that makes sense to them.

When the examination time comes, you cannot stop them from cheating. . . but if there are more counselors, and they have a session with the students, they will improve, and some of these ills such as examination malpractice wouldn't have been so much in this school.

Oluchi tries to talk with students but highlighted the damaging effects of lack of professional counseling in the school, asserting that this lack is one of the reasons so many students in general enter the examination with the intention to cheat. Oluchi did not mention that schools can support students in becoming mentors to model acceptable behavior, and the responses suggested that Oluchi needs to learn to clearly communicate and drive institutional goals and teachers' active participation to raise academic performance at the school.

High School B. Miasi perceives performance on the SSCE determines a student's future education. A good SSCE result qualifies a student for university education. Miasi stated:

If you are in 12th grade, and you don't write the SSCE, you can't go further when it comes to education. I say that it is the strength to get to the universities or any

other tertiary institution that you want to attend. Therefore, I think it is quite significant for students and the school because it will attract students to our school.

Miasi provides internal professional development to teachers, and there are particular programs targeted at communicating the relevance of the examination. The principal has programs to address the academic progress of her students such as regular class visits, referrals to the counselor, and discussions with parents on invitation. Miasi also noted that the rigors of SSCE preparation and strict disciplinary measures are affecting enrollment figures at her school. Most students in 12th grade at her school would prefer to enroll for the SSCE at schools where they can use their textbooks to aid them in answering the questions during the examination. Miasi would prefer to talk with students and try to make them understand the consequences of their actions and what the school would do differently in terms of discipline. Miasi's use of in-service training provides professional development experiences that can support teachers.

High School C. Ebube believes the essence of high school is to achieve good grades on the SSCE as evidence of readiness for higher education and stated that counseling students consistently on the relevance of the examination is more effective when communicating with students about improving self-motivation and good relationships. Ebube does not believe that there is an achievement gap in her school even though the performance is consistently average. Ebube stated:

Our results are good because about 50% of the students made good grades, a result of dedication and hard work on the part of teachers that we achieved this result. For the remaining students that did not make it, perhaps we [should] look to see if we can organize extra lessons for them.

Therefore, Ebube did not have any specific program or systems to make teachers aware of the need to improve the school's credit pass on the SSCE.

High School D. Amara believed the SSCE is Nigeria's most widely accepted high school certificate. It assesses high school students' general educational development and their ability to complete university-level work. The SSCE can also offer job opportunities after high school. Amara explained:

Definitely, the SSCE is a yardstick to measure what will happen in the university because the feedback we get from the students outside the country and from within the country shows that it is the basic foundation that is needed for a child to move ahead. If students do not have this foundation, definitely they are going to get involved with some problems when they get to the university.

As a result, Amara provides 12th grade students with fundamental information on university academic requirements through their alumni campus visits and feedback. The principal and teachers maintained a clear focus about the relevance of the SSCE that helped to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

High School E. According to Ngozi, the SSCE is increasingly more important to both students and the school because more prospective parents would like to enroll their

children in the school with graduates who qualify for university. Ngozi thinks the SSCE test is a reliable instrument that accurately measures student academic achievement and said that making students understand that they are in control of their choices is at the heart of discipline because punishment does not really work.

Ngozi stated, “Communicating the importance of this examination is almost like an anthem; we keep reminding the students during assembly that the basic goal is to obtain academic excellence, and I hope they listen and take responsibility for their actions.” Ngozi engages in reflective conversations with students in the hope that students internalize their choices and own the consequences that come with them.

High School F. Dami believes the SSCE is designed to measure student knowledge of the ordinary level syllabus. According to Dami, the intent of this high stakes test is to qualify students for postsecondary education. Student performance on the SSCE has been in the spotlight. The results are reported in terms of performance level. Speaking about the significance, Dami stated:

I tell students: You know that SSCE is a determinant exam . . . you must pass to continue your career. Further education depends on SSCE. For instance, you must have your SSCE to go into the university or any other high institution. So the significance is [you] must have it. If you finish secondary school, and you do not have it, you have wasted all the 6 years in secondary school. So every child should be made to know that without the SSCE, their educational career is almost on hold. It is as simple as that.

Dami tries counseling and discipline to help 12th grade students control their disruptive behaviors. The results support the conclusion that this principal has high standards and expectations for student learning. This expectation level clearly contributes to the school's success.

All principals had positive knowledge of SSCE as a measure of academic achievement and encouraged its continuing administration at their respective schools by (a) registering students for and administering the examination annually, (b) expressing their concerns about improving student performance on the examination, (c) leveraging the existing resources towards improved performance, (d) applying support structures, (e) leveraging the efforts of experienced faculty.

The latter were the different themes that emerged, suggesting that principals contributed to enhancing student performance in certain instances. In addition, the intention of these principals to improve student performance was supported by their willingness to provide answers to the research question. That their students performed better than average on the exam is a testament to their commitment to their success.

Research Question 3 (RQ3)

I focused on the school climate and teacher expectations and approaches in the third research question. How do Nigerian high school principals influence school climate and teacher expectations and approaches as they prepare students for the SSCE? Answers to RQ3 were derived from three sources: principals' interviews, focus group interviews, and document reviews. The result of mu analysis are reflected in the subsequent sections.

School A. Oluchi holds staff meetings to discuss administrative issues that affect the school and encourages the student government to discuss concerns affecting students. Oluchi stated that staff and students are assigned to different committees during school functions for effective logistics and participation. The lead teachers agreed that Oluchi does whatever is within her reach to support their expectations pending when the Ministry of Education will respond to their demands. They based their opinions on daily interactions, staff meeting agendas, and both formal and informal conversations. In Oluchi's words, "I cannot meet all the expectations of the teachers because that is the duty of the ministry, but I make sure I go into the staff room occasionally to encourage them."

The lead teachers believed that teachers in their school were working towards improving the results. The first lead respondent at School A stated, "Although our school result is not encouraging, we are still working on improving the result this year. We only need the students to take their studies seriously and stop depending on examination malpractice."

The second lead teacher participant asserted:

The principal will remind teachers of revisions before the examinations. We sometimes organize after-school classes for students that are performing poorly, although we do this without receiving any extra money. In addition to all these, the principal will follow up to ensure we teach the scheme of work by confirming from the students. The principal occasionally comes to the general staff room to check on how we are doing.

The fifth lead teacher explained:

The performance of the students has been below average because we do not have facilities like a science laboratory. The students are not willing to work hard.

They want to depend on external help. However, we tell them that the harder they work, the more success they will record.

Evidently, the support of a principal has a positive effect on teachers' willingness to take ownership of the success of their students and to strive to improve. Oluchi manifested low expectations for student performance when the school is preparing students for the SSCE. That attitude can be perceived as having a tremendous negative effect on the teachers in School A.

Documents such as school policy statements, a SSCE spreadsheet for the past 2 years, and organizational charts were not available. However, the announcement book, minutes of meetings, and school logbook were available. The paucity of needed documents at the school tended to reflect the poor preparation of the students.

In spite of Oluchi's introduction of extra lessons to compensate for student and teacher failure to cover the syllabus, a lack of commitment of many teachers and students persisted and deprived students of opportunities to be prepared fully for the SSCE. All concerned teachers, students, and principal were aware of the poor performance, but they were seemingly unable to collaborate as partners. Their best efforts were isolated and personal.

High School B. Miasi occasionally organizes conversations with staff concerning parents' involvement in assisting the school in reducing the practice of enrolling their children in another school for the SSCE where they could engage in examination malpractice. Miasi also provides a platform where students can discuss their academic concerns with counselors and participate fully in school activities.

We keep having counseling sessions and subject career seminars to prepare them.

I have different charts for courses in the university educating students on subject selection through the counselors. I make the counselors not teach but focus fully on counseling because some students have difficulty with their subjects. When they have difficulty understanding their subjects, they meet the counselor.

Miasi has designed specific programs for the school targeted at improving parental involvement, and invitations are extended to parents during school functions, and teachers and students actively participate. Participants in the focus group at School B agreed that communication against examination malpractice was one of the most positive and consistent factors in their school. Although Miasi appears to be liked by teachers, the focus group confirmed that Miasi's instructional leadership is very serious because they will always be called for reviews and analyses of student performance. The focus group respondents reported that Miasi was visible around the school and always helped as needed.

The seventh focus group respondent at School B explained their principal's willingness to collaboratively meet teachers' expectations that are within the official financial capacity as the principal:

With respect to what the principal is doing, I would like to say that we work collaboratively with the principal. For instance, ordinarily we should receive a stipend for the after school lessons we organize for the SSCE students but because of the synergy in our school, we voluntarily do it. Considering that this is a public school, it is difficult for the children to pay any extra money for this program so we voluntarily do it without minding the fact that we are staying after school.

A considerable amount of extra time is invested in helping their students because they feel responsible for their performance. Activities are planned for the teachers to work with their students after school so they can get additional help with the skills in which they are deficient. This commitment showed an awareness of the teachers' willingness to teach with sensitivity to students' needs. This approach also showed the depths of insight the principal has about students' needs.

The third respondent said:

Science is one area we always have challenges due to lack of equipment and materials that are needed for activities. We make requisitions to the principal who normally provides what is within the school's financial capacity with the explanation that the remaining items will be forwarded to the board for approval. Most often, the board will tell us they are still considering the request.

The eighth focus group respondent asserted:

Miasi instils discipline in all the students on examination ethics. “You know there are rules and regulations guiding the examination.” Miasi ensures compliance from the teachers and the students in making sure that every student has the approved writing materials for the examination before they are allowed into the examination hall.

Documents such as school policy statements, announcements, minutes of meetings, school logbook, the SSCE spreadsheet for the past 2 years, and organizational chart were available for School B. These plans provide details about school organization, student attendance, SSCE achievement data, and additional information about the work of the teachers and principal. Goals for the coming school year were also shown. Evidence from the document reviews aligned closely with the feedback received from the participants in the study.

Miasi’s standards are that it is unacceptable for teachers to be complacent about student performance. The expectation is that every teacher will do all he or she can to motivate, inspire, and encourage their students to achieve. Certain challenges that seemed to be related directly to the system of public schooling in the country, and were beyond the reach of Miasi and the teachers remained unresolved. These were inadequate learning materials, inadequate infrastructure, lack of information and communication technology (ICT) equipment, and sudden enrolment decline by final year students during SSCE registration. Nevertheless, Miasi’s efforts to sustain an effective learning environment for better student performance received support from teachers, students and some parents.

High School C. Ebube pointed out that though they do not offer any program solely to 12th grade students, as the school has after school lessons to support them. Ebube thinks that consistent counseling is more effective when communicating with students about improving self-motivation and good relationships and believes relationships with teachers and students in the school are very cordial because personal interaction between teachers and students is highly encouraged. Ebube added, “Both teachers and students are free to come to my office at any time. I also go around the school and classrooms to know what is happening and how I can be of help.”

Focus group participants at School C expressed how hard they work to prepare students for the SSCE. The focus group stated that Ebube visits classrooms. In addition to being visible, they reported that their principal was very accessible. The fourth focus group respondent at School C highlighted her experiences: Our principal is always talking to students to make sure they are at the right place at the right time, and this has actually helped the students. Our principal is very accessible and will give you a listening ear.”

The sixth respondent explained:

I commend our principal for successfully administering the SSCE in our school. Although our performance is average, we have not relaxed, and we are still working hard. Our principal takes care of the students, and this has enhanced the performance of the students. Our principal listens to teachers and encourages them to do well.

The school policy statements lacked the details mentioned during the interview with the principal such as staff personal ethics and values, results emphasis, and time management. It was clear that the principal considered these competencies to be of great value during the interview. However, one of the goals in the policy statement was to attract and support quality teachers.

Ebube's personal and professional attributes of friendliness, warm human relational skills, supervisory leadership, and accessibility to students and teachers were attested to by teachers. Elements worthy of note in Ebube's leadership actions were the warm human relational skills, supervision of teachers' work, and the random check of students' work. However, Ebube's low academic standards were caused by a leadership impasse and weak relationship with parents. Ebube had not only failed to communicate clear goals to direct and motivate the involvement of teachers and students, but was also ineffective in managerial, instructional, and collegial leadership roles. Consequently, this limited collaboration with Ebube's partners resulted in the lack of coordinated strategies for resolving the challenges of low academic performance.

High School D. Amara does not believe in yelling or in humiliating students when they misbehave. Amara believes in having conversations and being fair and consistent when disciplining students. Amara explains:

We are firm, and we are friendly, too. We talk [among] ourselves and we are able to get along in a peaceful manner . . . We have the student council with the head boy and head girl as chairmen. They meet and discuss issues affecting the

students. The students send in their request opinion and they discuss. They send the minutes to the principal; we look at it and approve things we need to effect and send to management.

A mentoring program pairing high performing students with slow learners is beneficial not only for 12th grade but for all students. Amara observed through leadership that having a mentoring program not only improved the social and emotional aspect of students but also their academics. Teachers, guidance counselors and the principal analyze the data to identify students who are performing poorly. With the principal modelling for teachers how to mentor their students, I concluded that modeling the steps involved in mentoring is a key strategy that should be included in the professional development program for principals.

The focus group respondents explained that Amara was consistent in actions, but the second respondent voiced frustration with the principal not motivating teachers enough. He reported feeling frustrated because he was not receiving enough appreciation for the extra work he had done:

As long as I'm not disagreeing with his opinion. I want to respect his opinion, but teachers here are just motivating themselves. No teacher here waits for principal's motivation to achieve because if you are waiting for the principal's motivation, you might not get it. I want to be frank: Each teacher here has taken it to be his or her own burden to make sure that the students in their subject area perform very well.

The focus group confirmed how Amara has a clear and constant focus on student achievement. The focus group reported that Amara uses resources to support their teaching process. The fifth lead teacher in School D stated:

Teachers are part of the contributions the principals have been making because the principal will meet with us before making final decisions. When clubs were not effective, we called for a meeting where we agreed to merge some clubs to make them more effective. We make suggestions vis-à-vis the school budget. We also have departmental meetings and proffer solutions. I raised a concern for more reading texts and Friday testing, and the principal approved. The school now provides individual students with copies of the Friday test items for students for assessment, and it has helped.

The seventh lead teacher described his experiences:

The principal verbally encourages us. The encouragement and motivation, I think, keep me particularly going. I think both the school and individual teachers are also interested in achieving good grades. Last year, specifically in this school, of 82 students, 79 students came out with A grades. I think to a great extent, we are looking forward to seeing that every student obtains good grades.

Evidence collected from document reviews such as school policy statements, announcements, minutes of meetings, school logbook, SSCE spreadsheet for the past 2 years, and an organizational chart strongly suggested that the main focus of the school is improving student performance. I noticed there were some specific goals in the school

policy statements that shared similar language with the feedback from the principal's interview responses. The principal agreed with the strategy to create a culture of strict adherence to support their goal to focus on exemplary classroom teaching and instructional leadership. Triangulation of all data points to the school's focus on improving student performance. To this end, Amara strongly communicates his interest in student performance, demonstrates a strong combination of knowledge of the curriculum, effective instructional strategies, and a willingness to help teachers create activities that will help students learn. These skills directly help improve the quality of instruction at School D.

High School E. Ngozi introduced remediation classes to improve classroom instruction for the 12th grade students. To support the social-emotional piece, Ngozi ensures that school counselors have no teaching assignment so that they can focus on their counseling responsibilities. Ngozi commented on students' active participation in school activities and recalled how the student government influenced the school menu to their favor. According to Ngozi:

My role as the principal is supervisory; therefore, I meet with the vice principals and heads of departments to discuss matters reported by teachers and students.

Thereafter, we make recommendations to the ministry or take action if the matter is within our jurisdiction. These heads of departments also supervise the teachers in their respective departments. I do not work in isolation.

Focus group participants described a variety of issues related to their perception of the principal towards staff professional development and student academic performance. These experiences consisted of being beneficiaries of ICT training. The third lead teacher respondent stated:

So many teachers are undergoing training on the use of ICT. Teachers have been divided into their respective departments for the training, and it is helping us do our work. Before now, we computed our results manually, but now parents can access results online.

The sixth lead teacher explained:

Our principal has zero tolerance for examination malpractice. A student who does not know the answers to the examination questions is advised to submit an empty script rather than cheat. The principal has also encouraged all teachers to participate in the demonstration of the SSCE organized by the West Africa Examination Council.

School E had school policy statements that were in effect. However, documents such as SSCE spreadsheets for the past 2 years were not readily available. Counselling and monitoring were strategies that the principal shared in the interview which were also visible in the announcement book. The organizational chart in School E showed a detailed description of the hierarchy because the responsibilities and departments were listed under each person's name. The data from the interview validated the organizational charts because the principal described the departments in the school. Data from this

school show that the principal has not designed specific programs for school improvement. However, there are opportunities for staff development. Although the school has opportunities that could drive academic improvement, the principal's leadership did not appear to effectively communicate the need for improved student performance.

High School F. Dami instituted academic programs tailored to students in the 12th grade. Even though there are guidelines provided by the ministry, Dami employs perceptive leadership and programs designed to achieve set targets:

We have a guide to run the schools from the ministry. All principals in all schools have that same guide, but the difference is their leadership skills. When you work at your school as the principal, look at the environment you find yourself in and apply your own leadership skills, and that makes you a different person. By the beginning of the session, we have programs that should be followed, and the students are allowed to have these programs in advance so that they know when they have a program as the weeks go by, and they know what they ought to do every week. That way, the members of staff are also happy.

Additionally, Dami is working with all teachers to encourage them to have discussions with students and find alternative ways to handle their disagreements. Dami has changed the school culture by introducing a culture of reading. More reading and science classes are being introduced, especially to the 12th grade preparing to earn SSCE credits.

Focus group participants at School F described positive academic programs and activities promoted by the principal to create an atmosphere where diversity and collaborations are respected. The first lead teacher respondent said:

Parents also come to school because we have what is called the ‘open day,’ a day parents come around to talk to the teachers about their children’s academic work. Teachers also talk to those parents whose children are not obtaining good grades. We discuss and recommend improvement measures with parents because it is not just the teachers’ job; we are partnering with the parents.

The fourth respondent said:

What the principal is doing has helped us to demystify our subject content and set better goals. Inasmuch as the principal will push us for excellence, students are also made to understand that this is their responsibility and their life. That has helped students to understand their role in the whole process. . . . These measures have helped my students’ results to steadily improve. I think as a teacher, it has kept me on my toes knowing fully well that if a child graduates without the required grades, I will feel bad as the teacher. Although we cannot rule out the possibility of some students performing poorly considering the normal performance curve.

A culture of excellence and hard work was the standard among the teachers at School F. The teachers knew they were doing their best because the principal maintained

a drive for continuous improvement through knowledge sharing and collaboration. The eighth lead teacher responded:

The school has a prize-giving day for staff and students, up to the kitchen staff. Everybody who performed well for that one year is called out and given a gift. The principal does not insist on making decisions for teachers just to comply. Teachers are not neglected in decision-making. The principal believes teachers are to implement whatever program the school approves; therefore, teachers are allowed to make suggestions.

The leadership of the principal had a strong influence on the culture of School F. The high expectations set for teachers and their students by the principal motivated everyone to seek continuous improvement. The principal's collaborative leadership helped transform the school culture.

The document reviews at School F revealed many items that promoted parental involvement: letters to attend speaking engagements, sports programs, and open day discussions. There were teachers' strategic plans, minutes of staff meetings, logbook, and SSCE result analysis for the last 2 years. These available documents were compared with the interview data to see if the information aligned. The teachers' strategic plans encompass the visionary structure and purpose of the plan, which is to set measurable student outcomes to support their students. The strategic planning helps teachers and the principal determine what they intend to do, how to implement it, and how to measure the outcome.

Most school principals employed some practices that were closely related to enhance student performance on the SSCE. However, the perspectives of these principals were influenced by their personal experiences, skills, and knowledge of SSCE administration. They were also committed to working with teachers to improve student performance by attempting to reduce the failure rate.

The principals, both directly and indirectly, affect their school climate. Some of the principals attempt to contribute to influence the school climate and teachers' expectations and approaches by (a) holding staff meetings, (b) attending to teachers' suggestions, (c) setting up student government, (d) encouraging diverse leadership styles, and (e) employing effective strategies.

The perceptions of principals regarding teachers' expectations and approaches are important to teacher and student performance. Furthermore, high performing school principals can and do use positive school climate to enhance teachers' expectations and approaches and student performance on the SSCE. The data illustrate how positive school climate is used to formalize, measure, and establish a clear link between effective school leadership and student performance. Thus, positive school climate is considered a bridge between learning and achievement in schools. In addition, effective principal leadership occurs when principals continually improve themselves professionally to be highly competent leaders and maintain a positive intention to improve student achievement.

Seven conclusions were drawn from the data that described principals' perspectives of student performance on the SSCE. These seven conclusions were:

- Twelfth grade students, especially in poor performing schools, struggle with academic rigor of the SSCE, having not thoroughly learned the content of a subject. In some instances, they resort to examination malpractice.
- Poor-performing schools have no specific programs to combat the high failure rate on the SSCE. The principals in these schools did not intentionally and collaboratively design data-based programs specifically to improve student performance
- Students face challenges because of personal, family, and educational system issues. The lack of effective principal leadership is central to highlighting the effects of all these challenges.
- There are no academic and behavioral programs specifically for 12th grade students in poor-performing schools. Students still ignore principal's admonitions and engage in examination malpractice in their desperation to pass the test.
- There are no specific plans to improve parental involvement in school programs by principals in poor-performing schools. The principals see parents as nonsupportive. Therefore, they made no effort to inspire and motivate parents.
- The importance of the SSCE was communicated through announcements during general school assembly, but the relevance of the SSCE was not clearly communicated in the policy statements and letters to parents. In addition, there were no bills displayed around the school to remind students to remain focused.

- There are no specific and relevant programs to promote a positive school climate in poor-performing schools. The principals felt helpless and blamed the ministry for not meeting teachers' needs.

Lack of effective principal leadership is the main cause of poor performance in failing schools because leadership is synonymous with influence and direction. The failure of principals to implement appropriate programs and their inability to lead teachers in a collaborative effort are signs of poor leadership, which culminates in poor student performance.

Themes That Emerged

This section is comprised of the emerging themes of the reasons Nigerian high school principals gave for their students' poor performance on the SSCE as answers to RQ1, the significance principals place the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement for RQ 2, and for RQ 3, how principals influence school climate and teacher expectations and approaches as they prepare students for the SSCE. The resulting themes from the case study for a high-performing school were consistent with other high-performing school students, and the themes for low-performing schools were also consistent with each other. The results for the cross-case synthesis were presented and applied to the research questions. Table 6 illustrates a summary of all themes in relation to the research questions.

Table 7.

Summary of Themes Based on Research Questions

	Research questions	Themes	Subthemes
1	What reasons do Nigerian high school principals attribute to student failure on the SSCE?	Student-related Family and socioeconomic issues The educational system	Lack of discipline Poor reading culture Lack of effort Lack of clear goals Emotional and social challenges
		Family and socioeconomic issues The educational system	Teacher instruction and behavior Facilities and materials
2	What significance do Nigerian high school principals place on the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement?	Academic achievement Building viable school Guarded optimism about SSCE validity Addressing future challenges	
3	How do Nigerian high school principals influence school climate and teacher expectations and approaches as they prepare students for the SSCE	Perceptive leadership Academic intervention programs Collaboration Parental involvement Leveraging competent teachers Effective strategies Commitment to improve SSCE performance Continuous school improvement plan	

Research Question 1: Reasons for Poor Performance on the SSCE

The school principals were interviewed about the reasons for the poor performance on the SSCE. Three major themes emerged from the interviews:

1. Student-related issues
2. Family and socioeconomic factors
3. Educational system

The following subsections are detailed explanations of the themes that emerged.

Theme 1: Student-related issues. In the opinion of study principals, the first major area, and largest by far, for failure of students on the SSCE has to do with issues related to students. Under this theme, five subthemes emerged: (a) lack of self-discipline, (b) poor reading culture, (c) lack of effort, (d) lack of interest, and (e) personality.

Principals work to enhance student performance on the SSCE in their respective schools by providing extra lessons after official school hours or in the morning before the start of official hours using revisions of past SSCE question papers. They also encourage personal study to support student improvement. School principals utilized formal counseling sessions with counselors available for formative purposes.

Miasi explained:

We [also] prepare them by having class quizzes. We are not doing very well in mathematics. It is a general problem. We are trying to have a mathematics club in the school for mathematics quizzes to boost their liking of the subject.

Subtheme 1: Discipline. All respondents reported that student discipline has an impact on their performance on the SSCE. Even though there are many reasons students perform poorly on the SSCE, several factors pertaining to discipline appear to affect their academic achievement. According to the interviewees, poverty, family background, and gang affiliations are part of the factors potentially impeding student discipline. Some high school principals are saddled with spending a lot of time on student and teachers discipline and have little time to attend fully to improving academic performance under ideal circumstances. Therefore, principals are concerned how they can check these ills in the system that is time demanding. Oluchi noted: “It’s going to be worse . . . but if there is guidance and counselors, and they have a session with the students, they will improve, and some of these ills won’t be so prevalent.” Amara stated categorically:” Number one is discipline because you cannot train the person who is not disciplined. If students are disciplined, then the staff and everyone is involved.”

Principals in poor-performing schools did not embrace collaborative leadership in their capacities as school leaders to check student behavioral challenges. Student discipline is essential for positive school performance.

Subtheme 2: Poor reading culture. Another student-related issue most school principals mentioned was students’ poor reading culture in preparation for the examination. The principals stated many reasons, including that a significant number of 12th grade students have poor levels of or lack a good reading culture for the examination, lack of learning and study skills, including time management, setting

priorities, and more. According to the participants, the academic success of students who are slow learners is mostly impeded by a poor reading culture. Ngozi described poor reading culture as a challenge to student success: “We are coming up again because all hands are on deck, extra lessons here, and it’s helping, but the core thing is students’ poor reading culture.

Furthermore, Miasi explained that some students have a misconception that one can pass the SSCE without studying but rather by engaging in examination malpractice. Miasi was very specific stating, “Students go and register in other schools where they are allowed to engage in examination malpractice.”

Amara thought that students fail because they are not willing to accept the academic rigor of their chosen subjects and the SSCE in general. In response to a question for clarification about the effect of poor reading culture on student performance Miasi explained, “Unwillingness, distractions, and, and this idea that boils in their heads that examination malpractice is an option, and that they could do anything [and] pass the exam.”

Ngozi saw insufficient academic skills as closely related to lack of time management:

Personal reading? They don’t do that. We have had courses when we engaged motivational speakers who come here to do sitting arrangements to enable students to read for hours. He taught them how to sit and do thorough studying because some of them don’t study; that is their challenge. They just want to skim

through their books. They think that is easier, but they need to bend down and do work. In fact, the kinds of books they have are self-teaching. Step-by-step, you can teach yourself. It was not like that in our day.

Poor time management and lack of study skills appeared as one of the major roadblocks to student success. Ngozi further explained that students wait until the last minute before they begin to study. They have home, social, and school obligations and cannot prioritize their tasks to accommodate all of these competing time demands. They have no plan that helps them to spend the necessary time reading, studying, attending class, completing assignments, and learning. As a result, they indulge in unrealistic activities and overcommit themselves. Ngozi added:

Poor time management and reading culture of students is affecting them so much. They will watch film rather than read their books. We have told them, if that's what you like doing, why not watch educational programs so that the same way you know those things you will know academics. These habits are dividing their attention and affecting their performance.

School principals have a major leadership role in helping students become successful readers and lifelong learners. However, principals in poor-performing schools did not take responsibility for making students good readers. They did not create any specific framework for reading success.

Subtheme 3: Lack of effort. The next subtheme under student-related issues was lack of effort. This category included both lack of effort and poor work ethic as

subcategories. Some principals were disturbed by how many students were satisfied with a grade of C or D instead of working harder to get better grades. Amara stated that even when they give students opportunities to improve their grades by organizing extra lessons, many students do not take it seriously. Amara confirmed that students expect to be excused for making poor grades based on their interest in and ability to pass the subject. That demonstrates a diminished sense of personal responsibility. Amara further explained that students do not exert enough effort and do not bother to find out, either from teachers or fellow students, how much work is really needed to pass a given subject, stating:

The reason some of them are not making it is [that] some of them have a phobia about mathematics, and no matter how sometimes you try to help them, they just don't respond, and [this is] peculiar to the arts students because they feel they don't need a credit in math.

Under the subcategory of "poor work ethic," Miasi explained that students do not complete answers, but then expect examiners to give them good grades. Some students expect to pass just because they made an attempt, and others think that going through the rigor required to pass with good grades is unimportant.

According to Miasi:

Students feel that they are through with education when they get to 12th grade, and this is affecting teachers. In such a situation, most of them do not know how

to answer the examination questions. You have to sit them down, using the marks scheme to teach them what is required of the question.

Still Miasi cited a much more serious problem where students receive answers to examination questions from some external agents to engage in malpractice and lack the ability to ascertain if those answers are correct. “If some person tells the students that we have gone to that particular school and then they move to that school. You know, it’s all over that you can just write this exam and pass through illegal means.”

Principals in public schools said failing students come to class late or do not show up at all. When they do show up, they do not pay attention. They do not read their books, and do not complete their assignments. Some students are not bothered if they fail. Ngozi explained that some students do not value education because they think there are alternatives for making money. Students are either unable or unwilling to put effort into learning. This could be due to lack of determination to be successful.

Ngozi further explained that many high school students do not read to learn:

Students fail because they do not put in the effort required to succeed. They only go through the pages of their books when compelled to do so, instead of reading to learn. Some students never read their notes. Some of our students are just not willing to work hard. Receiving an F grade is not enough deterrent for them to [participate in] activities [rather] than study.

School principals are expected to create the climate for academic success of all students. A principal having a high percentage of learners considered academically poor

performing should be especially challenged to create the required climate. The principals are not asking the right questions that can clearly define students, teachers, and principal's responsibilities. They should be asking what the students' responsibilities are for their learning and what they can do differently to institute innovative school reform initiatives adapted to address students' lack of motivation to learn?

Subtheme 4: Lack of clear goals. Lack of interest, persistence, and engagement were mentioned frequently in the interviews, which also included the following subcategories: (a) uncertain career choices, (b) carefree attitude, (c) lack of engagement, (d) lack of focus and passion, and (e) parental interference. Dami was of the opinion that failing students have little understanding of how education relates to their lives:

They do not have clear goals about where they are going. If someone has no idea where they are going, it will likely be extremely difficult to work hard at getting there. Another challenge is the students. The truth is that more than half of the students are yet to understand that they are writing this SSCE for themselves. Most of them think they are writing it maybe for [the teacher or for the school and] do not make their parents proud that they have passed their SSCE. They are yet to reconcile the fact that this SSCE is a door to their future. It becomes a challenge to bring them to the psychological level that will enable them to understand the importance of what is ahead of them.

Dami believed some high school students lack the desire to be in school. Perhaps they are being pressured by examination requirements or perhaps they are repeatedly failing

assessments. Ebube said students are not motivated to do academic work: “They either do not understand the course content, or they simply have given up hope of making it.”

Amara said that even students with passion “often lack the understanding of how specific subjects fit within the specific university courses, especially if they are informed [wrongly] that the subjects are not on the critical path” to their ultimate university career choice. Ngozi explained that some do not realize the amount of work involved in their core subjects or cannot decide precisely on a major course of study at the university.

Miasi said students lack direction, and that “These students attend high school with little, if any, goals in mind; making good grades means little to them due to the lack of connection between what they study in high school and their real life experiences.”

Finally, Dami said,

We have situations where parents force students to do sciences when that child is not a science student. We had a situation where we switched a student from science when she was not doing well, and that student proved to be very brilliant in the arts. So if that child was allowed to remain in sciences because of the parents, that child would have been struggling even when the child would have been a champion in other areas. So these are the areas parents have to be very careful with their children because sometimes their mind is made up that their children should be an engineer, doctor. . . and for that reason their child must be a science student. Some parents might want that child to inherit their profession;

maybe they have a chamber, so they want their child to be a lawyer so as to inherit the chamber.

Subtheme 5: Emotional and social challenges. Issues related to emotional and social challenges were mentioned frequently among student-related factors. This category includes lack of social connection, lack of a support system and network, and poor self-esteem and self-confidence. Ebube thought lack of self-confidence was the major reason for failure:

In my opinion, most students fail because of a lack of self-confidence because I wonder why some of my bright students make failing grades. I believe that they are smart enough to do the work. I try to work with the counselors to improve their self-confidence, because if their self-confidence improves, grades will improve.

In another example, a lead teacher respondent said, “Learning is social. The lack of connection between students in public and private schools can make some students feel isolated and, hence, unengaged.” The general feeling was that if students “have interactions with faculty and students outside of their schools,” they would be more likely to succeed on the SSCE. One respondent mentioned teamwork as an important factor in science and engineering classes. Another mentioned lack of support from faculty members. One lead teacher said, “Students also fail because their support network is challenged.” This could be a “student from low-economic status with no one to help” or lack of support at school.

Respondents said students face emotional and social instability that negatively affect their learning in school. Students neglect their learning and indulge in hanging out with friends, especially in public schools. Oluchi commented that all students want to belong somewhere. Other principals stated that teenagers have the drive for acceptance that makes them “imitate their peers and join groups, [whether] clubs, cliques, or gangs.”

According to Oluchi:

Every child in the senior secondary school is an adolescent. . . [and] wants to be recognized. They want to see themselves as if they have arrived, know the chemistry of their bodies and how they are, but if there is guidance and counselors have a session with the students, they will improve and some of these ills such as drug addiction and cultism wouldn't have been so much in this school.

Attending to students' social and emotional needs is crucial. Learning will be challenging if students feel threatened or insecure. Principals are expected to employ specific strategies that create a safe and healthy environment for students and teachers.

Theme 2: Family and socioeconomic issues. Parents and their economic conditions were also mentioned among factors that influence student academic outcomes. According to Oluchi, another major reason for student failure, especially in public schools, is family and socioeconomic issues. Principals cited family issues such as poverty, misplacement of priorities, and single parenting. Oluchi said the reason for poor performance is the following:

Back at home, there is nobody edifying the students. When your child comes back from school, you should ask your child, “What did you study today?” Like I told you before, in this state we are used to marrying many wives and having many children so [there is] nobody to direct the child. The Bible is correct when it said that a good woman will build her own home. Those children without mother or stepmother? Who builds them? They must be built from the homes.

It was clear from Miasi’s comments that schools care about their students, who are working against substantial odds in order to get an education with a difficult study environment at home. As Miasi explained:

Most of these students are domestic workers. Their guardians do not allow them to come during the extension classes because they need them to take care of their kids. When we have programs for them after school, they don’t allow them [to attend]. We mostly have support programs after school. These parents have this idea that education is totally free. They are not committed in any way. Books are not bought for their children; they expect the government to do everything thereby throwing away this partnership, partnering with the government paying tuition. I remember in those days while we were in school, our parents will come for our list of books. Now if you give the list of books, you’re just wasting your time. They expect the government to do everything for them those days. I had about three textbooks in biology. Now they don’t even have one, not to talk about having three. Parents are also happy not buying books for their children. I cannot

say it's the hard time because in those days our parents were not rich. It's just the perception. How will parents give priority to Christmas clothing and festivities against their children' education?

Respondents sounded understanding about these challenges but also helpless in being able to do anything about them. Perhaps the most interesting comment was one that Oluchi blamed lack of proper parenting as a reason for failure:

My students don't do well because they are not loved. They are coming from polygamous homes. A man can have 10 children with no mother in the house. So the child cannot do well because going back home, nobody tells the child to read. There is no extra input.

It was obvious from Oluchi that a high percentage of parents of students in public schools are not supportive. Therefore, parents completely lose track of the education of their children because they cannot help them do their homework. The home teaching process does not exist. Principals in some schools tend to make few efforts to develop a relationship with poor and minority parents or guardians. Parents or guardians are not encouraged to gain trust in the school through school activities.

Theme 3: The Educational System. This theme includes categories of responses that reflect participants' views on how the educational system affects learning and ultimately, student outcomes. Teacher instruction and behavior were mentioned most under failures of the educational system. Subcategories include failure to address diverse learning styles, lack of professional development, lack of student-friendly learning

formats, and teacher behaviors and attitudes toward students. Principals who commented on this thought teachers needed to teach students how to study and how to set goals:

Oluchi said teachers should encourage students to work hard and help students improve study skills and time management skills. Miasi is of the opinion that faculty members need to nurture new, higher-level learning skills. The principal blamed either the teachers or the teaching style for student failure, believing that some teachers do not put enough effort into engaging the underprepared students in the subject or only help those students who ask for help.

Miasi was quite passionate about this failure:

Some teachers are not committed to this job; some of us just see this job as a means to an end because there are no jobs to be done so they just find themselves in the teaching job. The zeal is not there. You know this teaching is a profession that requires your total commitment, but there are still very committed teachers.

The teaching style of some teachers was identified as contributing to student failure. As such, they could not learn. Others cited faulty subject mastery and teaching students the wrong content about the topic they are studying. Miasi believes that some teachers do not bother to know their students beyond knowing their names:

They do not realize that some students might have missed classes and might not be as prepared as others to take the examination. It is possible that students register for a subject they discover is too difficult to understand. Sometimes the

pace is too fast, or students did not adequately learn required material in previous classes.

Miasi emphatically stated:

Some teachers are not committed to their job. Some teachers just see this job as a waiting room for a better job because there are no jobs. Therefore, they are not committed and not interested. Teaching is a profession that requires your total commitment. When such uncommitted teachers have challenges that require their staying out of school for some days, they never care to see how they can teach the topics they missed during their absence without been reminded or persuaded.

However, we still have [some] very committed teachers.

Inadequate supply of materials was mentioned as another cause in general under failures of the education system. Subthemes included lack of sufficient or appropriate student and academic services. Amara, however, praised his school: “Our management board does a wonderful job at providing students with the necessary material for effective learning.”

Other factors, particularly from public schools, were inadequate facilities and poor learning environment. Miasi mentioned:

On the part of the government, the schools are not adequately equipped. For the practical exams, it is at that point of exam that these practical materials are brought. How do you practice all these before the exam properly? Financial emphasis is not given to the schools, so how do you cope?

Dami stated:

For me as a principal I will think of the management . . . a lot of things will come together for one to begin to look at things responsible for student performance. On the part of management, it could be that some certain things are not put right for the students. May be the books they are using at the moment may not be the ones they are supposed to use, and that could call for review.

The interdependent relationships in Figure 4 illustrate the interaction between the principal, teachers, and students. This nested system of the principal, teachers, and students has a reciprocal influential on each other. Leaders, therefore, need to be able to respond appropriately to their contexts.

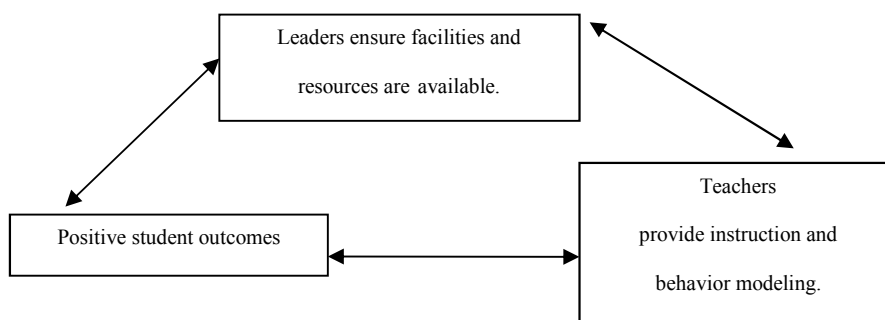


Figure 4. Reciprocal Relationship between educational system and student performance. Adapted from Evaluating the wider outcomes of schools: Complex Systems Modelling by R. D. Crick, S. Barr, H. Green, & D. Pedder, 2016, *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 1–23. Copyright by SAGE publications.

From Figure 4, the leader, teacher, and student are conceptualized as interrelated. Effective principal leadership is based on measures of higher student achievement and prioritized teaching and learning practices. Teachers' professional approach has a

positive influence on student learning. The reciprocal effect for positive students' outcomes is appropriate to attract support, collaboration, and participation with the leader.

Composite reasons for poor performance. The first question of this case study sought to provide reasons principals attribute to poor student performance on the SSCE. Challenges such as low socio-economic status, family background, education system, and various other social concerns were listed as important challenges that contributed to the poor performance of students and, in turn, the schools. Poor performance is rarely caused by only one factor. Considering these factors, two categories emerge: the limiting factors that principals face within their schools, and the leadership influence that principals have in their schools. Poverty and social ills create challenges for individual student learning that many school leaders lack the knowledge required to address. The negative effects of poverty and social challenges on student learning were greatly magnified in schools with poor leadership.

Although principals in public and federal schools share similar challenges, the principals of the high-performing federal and public schools implemented core practices and created conditions within their schools that can improve academic achievement. Poor-performing schools often lack the leadership needed to drive academic achievement. Lack of vision, poor communication, inattention to teaching quality, and failure to make decisions are some of the characteristics of poor leadership in failing schools. Consequently, principals at poor performing schools were ill prepared to

accomplish necessary tasks. Therefore, it was necessary to describe how the principals perceived the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement in the next research question.

Research Question 2: Significance of the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement.

Principals were asked how they regard the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement. Five themes overlapped and reinforced the three themes from Research Question 2:

1. Academic achievement
2. Building viable schools
3. Guarded optimism about the validity of SSCE result
4. Addressing future challenges

Theme 1: Academic Achievement. Principals from all schools emphasized the significance of the SSCE, especially as an admission requirement for Nigerian universities and universities abroad. The significance school principals placed on the SSCE is that it validates high school learning and gives higher education institutions a signal that the certificate holder has achieved a certain level of academic knowledge. One of the principals believes that SSCE achievement is a powerful indication of an effective high school education and university readiness.

Amara described messages from parents of ex-students who gained admission to universities:

Parents come to tell us that their children are either in Canada or another country, they have a scholarship, and they have not paid any money. They are doing well. Sincerely, it's something to talk about. These ex-students are happy when they come here because they walk tall and come to my office to thank me. They tell us what we [provided for] them.

Miasi had a similar opinion:

If you do well, and you know that you wrote the exams yourself, then you have good confidence in yourself [and] you will be proud of yourself. You will believe in yourself, that confidence is built, and you can face any other thing; you can face any other exams. But if you are not the proper person who wrote the exam yourself, of course, that's why there is still failure in the universities. But if you are confident, that means you will apparently be a better student in the university.

Oluchi explained the desperation attached to good grades on the SSCE:

Without the SSCE you cannot explain to anybody in Nigeria how you got your first degree. You can't explain how you came to a master's degree no matter the lies you tell that the certificate was burnt. Deep down inside, you know you are lying. It is very crucial. And, therefore, everybody must get [the certificate]. That is the reason for examination malpractice.

Amara stated the significance of the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement

as:

It is a yardstick to measure what will happen in the university because the feedback from the students outside the country and from within the country shows that it is the basic foundation that is needed for a child to move ahead. If a child does not have this basic foundation, definitely he's going to [have] some problems when he gets to the university. So it is very important because the university education continues from where the SSCE stops. A child that cannot pass well in the secondary school exams may not be able to cope in the university, which is why in the Nigerian system of education, such children are asked not to continue, [and] they don't continue.

The principal's support of student learning is especially important for revitalizing poor-performing schools. Although principals at both high- and poor-performing schools claimed to know the relevance of the SSCE, high-performing school principals encouraged collaborative support and motivation in their schools illustrating that knowledge.

Theme 2: Building viable schools. The high-performing school principals leveraged the achievement of their students on the SSCE performance to enhance their teachers' effectiveness by recruiting highly competent teachers. This update was necessary because schools need to record a high credit-pass percentage on the SSCE to attract prospective parents. In Amara's opinion,

It is very important to the school because without a good SSCE result, the school might not be able to attract new students for enrollment. The enrollment will be

poor because it is an index that your school is not good. The result is very important to the student and parents. If your school is recording poor results on the terminal exams, then obviously it's going to affect the enrollment of the school, although public schools do not have mandated SSCE performance targets as part of their performance evaluation process.

To Miasi, however, it makes no difference:

There are no benefits from the government. Why [do I say that]? Because there is only a personal benefit and not from any other quarter. That satisfaction I get is as a teacher who prepared students for an examination they were able to pass. At least that gives me credit that I was able to do well if my students did well. They are able to assess my performance through the performance of the students.

Some public and federal school principals use the rich pool of knowledgeable teachers for knowledge-sharing opportunities and to help guide teachers in need of support. Evidently, the development and use of highly competent teachers helped the principals of these schools to appreciate their expertise by using teachers when preparing students for the examination. The teachers employed multiple strategies that were bridged by teachers and students to support student preparation and performance. It is important to emphasize that the school principals did not always apply cutting-edge facilities and materials in support of student preparation, but did apply different types of methodologies deemed appropriate for students needs due to their strong commitment to improved student performance. The fact that principals of poor performing schools are

faced with a negative image because their schools do not have improved academic records has not prompted them to review their strategies. It could be that these principals need refresher courses on school improvement initiatives.

Theme 3: Guarded optimism about the validity of SSCE results. The respondents showed guarded optimism about the validity of SSCE results, acknowledged the strengths and weaknesses of the examination administration process, and were optimistic about the grading system. However, they had some reservations about the credibility of the results earned by some students in schools where examination malpractice is common. Oluchi stated emphatically:

Because the Nigerian system has [established] the SSCE as final criteria for university admission, there is desperation. Nigeria is looking for first class and second class upper, and they now look down on third class and pass degrees. Some of the first class are fake, and second-class upper degrees because those who do not have money to pay lectures in this time might scarcely make it. If you don't have money to pay, then to a large extent forget it because you will become third class or pass. If you have money, you can even be an idiot, and you will graduate with second class. I'm also telling the Nigerian government to look into that boy that has a pass degree. Let them be tried again to see whether it is really a pass degree or a third-class degree. The SSCE certificate is crucial, and so students are desperate to make it. When the examination time comes, they don't listen or obey rules.

Theme 4: Addressing future challenges. The principals expressed much concern and fear about their future performances because of the growing rate of examination malpractice and the free access students have to move from one school to another and be allowed to register as bona fide students of that school for the examination. The concerns were (a) free illegal movement of 12th grade students between high schools, (b) the lack of performance targets, (c) a high level of poor discipline in schools where principals and teachers perpetuate examination malpractice, and the (d) eagerness of educators to aid examination malpractice for personal financial gain. Miasi said:

You find that students can be up to 400 while we are preparing them for the examination, but at the point of registering for the exam most of them run away. Maybe out of the 400 students, don't be surprised if you get 100.

You just see that sudden fall in the number of students that registered for the exams. They go and register in schools where they can be allowed to engage in examination malpractice.

Composite View of SSCE. The second question of this case study was designed to learn how principals in the southern city-states of Nigeria viewed the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement. In response to several different questions concerning the possible significance of the SSCE, all principals went into detail to express the potential of SSCE to give high schools the data to benchmark their programs and then predict student future performance in college. While the six principals were optimistic about the validity of the SSCE, Oluchi cautioned that SSCE results are not always void of

examination malpractice in some schools. While the potential for doubt may be there, the results could be used to help shape teaching practices in a way that would be more beneficial.

The future was perceived to get worse without intervention, especially in schools where principals exhibit weak leadership traits. Therefore, a theme of addressing future challenges emerged. Another theme on building viable schools showed that the principals felt that high performance on the SSCE had the potential to provide their schools with increased enrollment. With these themes in mind, it became necessary to describe how, if at all, SSCE performance was reported to influence the daily practices of the principals in creating a positive school climate and supporting teachers' expectations and approaches.

Research Question 3: How do principals influence a school climate and teachers' expectations and approaches?

Seven themes emerged from the interviews:

1. Perceptive leadership
2. Academic intervention programs
3. Collaboration
4. Parental involvement
5. Continued school improvement plan
6. Effective strategies
7. Leveraging competent teachers

Theme 1: Perceptive leadership. While some principals are more intentional in promoting a positive school climate than others, all employ diverse leadership styles. Lead teachers' responses described the different approaches used by their school principals to manage the schools. These approaches helped minimize the challenges in some schools. Amara said:

We frown when it's time to frown; we play together when we are supposed to play; we eat together, but when it comes to time to be serious, everybody just has to get to the job and do it the way it's supposed to be done. Those are some of the things that help students to be their best.

Oluchi stated, "I cannot meet all the expectations of the teachers because that is the duty of the ministry, but I make sure I go into the staff room occasionally just to encourage them."

Each participant discussed the school climate and their role in its development. A lead teacher respondent at School E stated:

The principal is an encouraging person. She is very humane, and I think teachers very much love her. Everyone speaks good of her. She has a way of getting at you. She's not the type that goes politicking. Even when you are wrong, she has a way of pulling you and ensuring that you do your work and everyone is picking up. Because she is not too punitive, you'll want to please that person, and you will want to do your work.

Miasi set the tone with a different approach and explained:

From my perception, I think there's that seriousness in the tone of the school.

Well, we know that we strictly stick to discipline. If [students] come late to school, [they] are punished for coming late. Then, when it becomes frequent, we send [them] to the counselor to find out what [their] challenges are, why [they] are always coming to school late. Sometimes we need to call the parents to find out why.

Some school principals demonstrated their instructional leadership by providing teachers with different types of trainings that allowed them to lead with some degree of independence. Focus group respondents in School F described the different approaches used by the school principal to support their effectiveness. This approach helped minimize the challenge of sticking to prescribed ministry methods. All six schools mentioned leadership teams at the departmental level for planning and decision making. Amara used a continuous improvement culture with very high expectations to enhance teacher performance. Respondents repeatedly mentioned a culture of excellence as one of the reasons the school is distinguished among public schools, especially in their teacher evaluations. The third focus group respondent in School B stated:

Normally we have several departments in the school. We also have meetings and general meetings in most cases. Some of the decisions and the agendas of the meetings are accepted by the principal, and in most cases when we are lacking

anything, we could inform the head of the department to forward such problems to the principal, and then things appear together for the smooth running of the school.

The high-performing principals enhanced teacher effectiveness with strong and perceptive leadership for teachers and staff. These principals are instructional leaders who exercise good judgment about the best practices needed to improve teachers, individually and collectively, especially during lessons. Dami uses a leadership style that is focused on building teachers' and students' personality and skills. Additionally, Amara leads teachers and students in setting and achieving their goals and follows with collaboration to help them achieve those goals. Clearly, these school principals in high-performing schools are instructional leaders who exhibit perceptive leadership qualities.

Theme 2: Academic intervention programs. While most schools do not have a specific program to combat failure, many offer 12th grade students extra lessons on Saturdays, after school, early morning on school days, and motivational sessions at other times, with emphasis given to mathematics and science. Even though all students are encouraged to take advantage of this extra help, "Many students in public schools prefer to withdraw and enroll in schools where examination malpractice is thriving." Ebube explained how she provided support to students and increased the likelihood that planned interventions would be successful; Miasi enlisted the assistance of counselors with experience and expertise. Principal, E described the efforts of her teachers to provide supports to students such as extra learning opportunities and access to teachers. In Dami's

words, “When preparing students for the SSCE, I tell my teachers that it is time to have a reflective look at the past examinations.” The evaluation of the instructional approaches of teachers and the development of intervention programs are specific behaviors expected of principals in schools where students persistently perform poorly. While these strategies are lacking, student poor performance remains unresolved.

Theme 3: Collaboration. Each principal had a different perspective when it came to establishing a climate for student success. Dami stated:

Even in policymaking, we have student representatives. Yes, they meet with the teachers, and before the meeting they tell their peers to write what they think is a challenge from the students’ angle. We look at it together. So we cannot do without them. If you put them aside, it’s like in a home as a parent you don’t do the reasoning alone; you ask your family, and by the time they tell you what they think, you will be surprised.

Dami further explained that he only steps in to issues to give them direction. He perceives himself as very consistent, treating students and teachers fairly. He thinks they feel good about themselves teaching in a nonthreatening atmosphere. Miasi stated she employs two major strategies: to address concerns raised by teachers and students and developing a plan of improvement and to give teachers support that subsequently affects their classroom instruction. Amara uses existing structures to enhance teacher effectiveness: school structure, the framework around which the school board and teachers are organized to enhance their effectiveness, and supporting the objectives of the

school. The principal also uses a continuous learning approach to consistently communicate with teachers and students and holds meetings with different departments to convey information on how to apply certain initiatives as well as to reflect with the members about the results on the ground and share any knowledge pertaining to the school's success. Some principals provide opportunities for teachers to be involved in developing school policies through collaborative learning communities that are established to determine appropriate professional development programs.

Theme 4: Parental involvement. Parental involvement is low in many schools. Oluchi believes that parents tend not to take an interest in student learning when they are not their biological children but rather are domestic workers. Ebube thinks that parents do not care about their children's education because they are busy trying to make more money and that "parents only come to school when they are called to address behavioral issues." The principal explained that parents are not proactive and knowledgeable about the academic program. In her words: "We always tell parents to support their children. The people not helping us are parents because who push their children to us."

However, Dami has a different opinion:

Parents also come to school because we have what is called "open day," a day parents come around to talk to us teachers about their children's academic work. We also talk to those parents whose children are not doing well; we tell them to look at what we observed about your child; the child needs help here and there. We put hands together because it is not one person's job.

Parental participation in high performing schools has positive effects upon student achievement. The principals' role is foremost in the development of positive school family relationship. In poor-performing schools, the effect of parental participation is negligible.

Theme 5: Continue school improvement plan. Continuous school improvement was a practice demonstrated at Schools F and D for improving teaching and learning. To improve teachers' performance, Dami uses feedback from students on how teachers are using the professional development trainings and the expectations they have for their students. The principal implements this through collaboration and consultation as well as a process for collating feedback from all constituents and drawing up a prioritized schedule of improvement for academic achievement both for the short and long terms (see Appendix M).

Amara explained that their development plan would include the areas that were unsatisfactory and strategies for improvement, strategies that have to include a beginning and an end date when it would be analyzed to determine whether they were actually improving. The principal also uses a follow-up system that is linked to teachers' professional development. Schools can only make effective use of their limited resources when they focus on specific goals and strategies for improvement. The process improved student achievement levels in high performing schools by creating a positive environment for learning.

Theme 6: Effective Strategies. School principals enhance teachers' performance by introducing effective strategies to support their goals for quality and continual improvement of teaching and learning. The effective strategies applied by Dami included the practice of student assessment such as a continuous formative assessment program.

Amara confirmed:

It is very important. I tell my teachers that apart from every other thing you have done, try to use at least the past 6 years' questions in your subject. That has worked out over the years. There is no [way you can review these] past 6 years question papers with the students that they will not be confident about passing that subject.

Amara explained that he used data analysis to hold meetings with teachers about the outcome of the interpretations of where the school is, what has been discovered, and what we would like to improve, and, after that, find that we have much more consistency in the way that teachers are improving in the delivery of the instructional program. He further explained that he encourages teachers to take advantage of the existing opportunities that are linked to teacher methodology to improve teacher and student performances such as asking a teacher to visit another classroom and listen to a colleague he thinks demonstrates more competence in a topic and subject, and says, "It's a good way to identify teachers that are phenomenal and capitalize on teaching others the things that they know how to do really well."

Miasi mentioned that the school had to change the class schedules for students who are slow learners and had low math and English scores. Miasi added that she would have a conversation with teachers that need support and suggest professional development and opportunities in the school, or by simply collaborating, they may come up with some goals to work on together. Sometimes when teachers start working toward such goals, they can find the improvement coming from within. High-performing school principals collaboratively understand which classroom practices improve student achievement, and they support teachers in carrying out instructional practices that help all students succeed.

Theme 7: Leveraging competent teachers. Principals in high-performing schools enhanced student performance in their schools by recruiting and training competent teachers and having them participate in professional learning communities.

Amara explained:

In our school, teachers have opportunities to brainstorm teaching solutions with other teachers; they share teaching strategies and broaden their knowledge. These experiences generate rich knowledge about teaching and learning. We practice what we call team teaching in our school to help support new teachers. During the team-teaching sessions, more experienced teachers in their respective departments, say science or mathematics, will meet together and discuss challenging topics in their subject area and suggest possible solutions through practical demonstrations.

Dami links teachers to a pool of available resources and uses different opportunities--from informal and formal team teaching and student performance analysis--to link teachers to resources provided by the school. First, the principal links the teachers to different resources when they provide feedback. Second, the principal links the teachers with resources when teachers who were more experienced and proficient in certain areas were assigned to coach others. These resources were used for improving teaching and learning in the school.

Composite Influences on Climate, Expectations, and Approaches

The answers to the third research question described how Nigerian high school principals influence school climate and teacher expectations and approaches as their schools prepare students for the SSCE. The results showed that principals in high-performing schools play a pivotal role in improving student performance. A commitment on the part of these principals to meeting the needs of students promoted the consistent high performance their schools recorded. Principals at these schools innovatively employed strategies leading to a healthy school culture. In addition, these principals exhibited strong perceptive leadership attributes when they identified the academic needs of the students and collaboratively provided teachers with the appropriate resources, facilitated knowledge sharing among teachers, and helped teachers set high expectations for their students. These leadership qualities were used to enhance and encourage a positive culture. Consequently, perceptive leadership in high-performing schools contributed partly to themes such as “collaboration,” which describes how principals

support teachers with professional development resources and especially by maintaining a positive school climate.

Principals of poor-performing school viewed their efforts as negatively influenced by what they perceived were factors outside their immediate control, such as parental interference and lack of adequate support of the Ministry of Education. Because of these feelings, those principals were not proactive and intentional in their practices. They did not see parents as partners in the education of their children who could help foster a positive academic environment. They also did not seem to support leadership-fostering practices such as professional development opportunities and improving student achievement in terms of the number of students that passed the SSCE.

Summary

All principals linked poor performance on the SSCE to low socio-economic conditions and poor student discipline. Reflecting upon how Oluchi, Miasi, Ebube, Amara, Ngozi, and Dami perceived student performance on the SSCE through their reported daily practices, one issue became evident. The factors reported as affecting student poor performance are real from these principals' experience. However, high performing school principals applied perceptive leadership throughout their schools by deploying continuous improvement strategies. The answers to the research questions, then, were derived from using the themes to reflect the different perspectives of the principals. What do these mean in terms of policy initiatives, leadership practices, and future research? Based on the answers to the research questions, I will discuss the

interpretation and implications of these findings, recommendations, and limitations of the study in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings of each RQ that undergirded this multiple case study by describing principals' perceptions of student performance on the SSCE. The problem I addressed was that student performance on the SSCE in Nigeria is poor. Although many factors influence student achievement on the SSCE, researchers have consistently identified principal's leadership as a major influence on school outcomes--whether positive or negative (Bruggencate et al., 2012; Dunn & Rita, 2009; Nidus & Sadder, 2011; Valentine & Prater, 2011). The general problem was that the current low passing rate on SSCE continues to be an area of major concern because Nigeria needs to prepare adequate human capital to support all sectors of the national economy (Emiloju & Adeyoju, 2012). Students who fail to achieve their aspirations after high school because of poor academic performance or other reasons are more likely to engage in criminal activities and use illegal drugs (Kearns, 2011). The personal and societal costs of low achievement call for a reflective and focused approach to reaching desired student outcomes (Abdullahi & Onasanya, 2010).

Eberts and Stone (1986); Garvin et al. (2008); May and Supovitz (2011); and Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003) have asserted that academic outcomes measured by student performance are significantly associated with principal leadership. Ekundayo (2010) showed the need to learn principals' perceptions of student performance on the SSCE in Nigeria. Therefore, it was important to learn how principals' behaviors affect student performance since there are mutually positive relationships between principal

leadership and academic outcomes (Cheng, 2002; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Sergiovannie, 2001).

The RQs used to guide this study were as follows:

RQ1: What reasons do Nigerian high school principals attribute to student failure on the SSCE?

RQ2: What significance do Nigerian high school principals place on the SSCE as a measure of academic achievement?

RQ3: How do Nigerian high school principals influence school climate and teacher expectations and approaches as they prepare students for the SSCE?

The research design of this study, articulated in Chapter 3, was a qualitative framework within a multiple case study approach. I used purposeful sampling to identify six high school principals with 3 or more years of SSCE administration experience in their current schools. Two principals were selected from each school type (private, state, and federal). Three of the participant schools had a record of 80% of students passing the SSCE, and three had a record of consistent failure. Eight lead teachers from each of the six schools whose principals agreed to participate in the study were selected for focus group interviews. This selection criterion was used to ensure that the principals and lead teachers were more knowledgeable and established in understanding how they lead their schools. I will conclude the study by providing the following in this chapter: (a) interpretation of the findings, (b) explanation of the limitations of the study, (c)

recommendations, (d) implications, and (e) conclusions. This chapter will be organized into five sections, each focused on one of those goals.

Interpretation of Findings

There was a gap in the literature about how principals influence student achievement on the SSCE in Nigeria. As a result, there was a need to determine how principals develop and sustain a school climate that supports teachers' expectations and student outcomes as they monitor preparation of students for the SSCE in a region with nearly half of all high school students failing the exam. Ekundayo (2010) studied the administration of secondary schools in Nigeria and concluded that principals should ensure they lead efficient schools as they attend to certain managerial responsibilities. Oyedeji and Fasasi (2006) determined principals should make instructional leadership a top priority, while Alaka and Obadara (2013) suggested the need for educators to create effective schools through best practices.

As stated in Chapter 4, the key findings of the study were that a lack of strong leadership was the main cause of poor performance in failing schools because leadership is synonymous with influence and direction. In addition, principals in high performing school showed operational differences because of their leadership approaches that were largely determined by their approaches to developing and maintaining a positive school climate.

Summary of Key Findings

Student-related issues. All principals blamed students in some way for their poor performance on the SSCE. Participants stated that poor self-discipline, poor reading culture, lack of effort, lack of interest, and personality issues are part of the factors potentially impeding student academic success, and all principals expressed interest in working with their teachers to improve student performance. Some school principals, especially in low-performing schools, wanted specific programs to help improve student performance on the SSCE.

Family and socioeconomic issues. The family conditions of some 12th grade students, especially in public schools, hindered their passing the SSCE. Many principals stated that poverty was a factor in the reasons for failure. Most students in public schools are either from polygamous or single parent homes, live in poor neighborhoods, and have no adequate space for study. Other students had chores at home, especially as domestic workers, and lack the time or were not allowed to participate in all school activities.

Principals in both private and federal schools cited parental interference in their children's career choice selection. Some parents insisted on certain careers to ensure their children inherit their businesses. Others want to boost their social status without considering the capabilities, abilities, and interests of their children. Therefore, family-related challenges play an important role in the academic success of 12th grade students in schools with weak principal leadership.

The educational system. The facilities and resources available to support learning at the school level were found to be major factors affecting SSCE performance in some schools. What most principals could not produce was a continuous school improvement plan designed to meet educational needs in the short and long terms. One cause, then, was lack of physical resources and a concrete plan to provide educational needs.

Academic achievement. School principals expressed that passing the SSCE is a requirement for national and international university admission. The results of the exam, if positive, could also boost enrolment and help strengthen their schools. Strategies expressed by principals to improve student performance on the SSCE by 12th grade include the provision of extra lessons after school and on Saturdays, review and supplementary classes, mock examinations, counseling, and provision of necessary materials. What principals of low-performing schools did not state was what they do before 12th grade to try to reduce the failure rate on the SSCE.

Building and maintaining viable schools. High performing schools had an existing culture of excellence acquired through building resources and maintaining high performance on the SSCE to remain an option to prospective parents. These principals used a continuous school improvement plan with very high expectations to enhance teacher performance in the school. What poor performing schools could not do was to enhance teacher expectations and approaches with a culture of excellence.

Guarded optimism about the validity of the SSCE. Principals and teachers showed guarded optimism and concerns about the validity of the SSCE in a situation where some students have an unfair advantage over others due to the increasing rate of examination malpractice, as some students in certain schools are allowed to cheat during the examination. This practice typically increases the passing rate. The SSCE testing manual is useful but principals need to ensure that all students can test under a uniform set of conditions. Nigerian principals need to comply with all applicable policies.

Future challenges. Principals need to address future challenges if they are to lead effectively. Teachers expressed concerns about their motivation. These concerns were partly being addressed by some principals by providing training workshops to educate teachers about effective performance and motivation. The fact that teachers initiated the discussion of these concerns suggests that principals need to provide for those needs. Because examination malpractice was a concern that affects the validity of the SSCE result, principals need to lead effectively to prevent this practice in their schools.

Perceptive leadership. Though principals of low-performing schools made conscientious efforts to talk with teachers about the failure rate, they did not state that there were specific programs in place that were research based or best practices to prevent poor performance on the SSCE in the first place. Principals of high-performing schools were instructional leaders who manifested those skills to help motivate teachers and their students when their schools prepare students for the SSCE. These principals enhanced teacher expectations and approaches with their perceptive leadership skills.

Collaboration. Principals who promoted professional collaboration among teachers and students; shared decision-making; and promoted community involvement and opportunities for students' social, emotional, ethical, and intellectual learning were more successful. They supported parental involvement by scheduling parent-teacher meetings, inviting parents to school programs, soliciting parents' suggestions, sending materials home, and communicating with parents about student progress. They were clearly willing to commit considerable time to these efforts.

Implementing effective strategies: Principals in high-performing schools had a continuous improvement plan and provided effective strategies, such as managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement. These principals also helped their teachers achieve their strategic objectives. These strategies were applied at different organizational levels and had a direct impact on teacher performance. The principals enabled the teachers to leverage the existing learning-support system.

Leveraging competent teachers. Principals in high performing schools recruited and trained competent teachers and provided them with professional development opportunities, such as collaborative skills and in-service training, which partly strengthened teacher performance. Some principals and teachers implemented some measures towards improving student performance on the SSCE out of a commitment to improve performance. They achieved this by creating communities of teachers that affect instruction and other aspects of the classroom, and thereby, exerted an indirect influence on student outcomes. Teachers participated in professional learning communities and

have opportunities to brainstorm teaching solutions with other teachers, share teaching strategies, and broaden their experience.

Parental involvement. The sixth major theme was that principals in low-performing schools did not have a specific program to improve parental involvement in their children's education. Three principals said they had poor parental participation even during Parent-Teacher Association meetings. Although these principals showed interest in building collaboration among stakeholders, they did not express any knowledge of how to create a school climate that motivated active participation of all constituents.

Continue school improvement plan. Principals in high performing schools, through collaborations and consultations with constituents, designed a continuous school improvement plan that was a prioritized schedule to improve academic achievement both for the short and long terms.

The findings suggested that principal leadership determines the direction that the school takes. The results highlighted the lack of strong leadership as the main cause of poor performance in failing schools because leadership is synonymous with influence and direction. High performing schools were characterized by effective and efficient principal leadership. When the principal was failing to deal with issues of collaborative leadership, the outcome would be poor performance. It was evident that lack of effective principal leadership is central to all the challenges mentioned in the sections above. Failure to implement appropriate programs and inability to lead teachers in a consistent manner are signs of poor leadership, which was manifested in students' failing the SSCE.

Furthermore, the results showed that the principals of the low performing schools used practices they are familiar with to attempt enhancing student performance. Consequently, principals at low performing schools used more traditional approaches to support teacher practices in the teaching and learning process. However, principals at high performing schools used more promising practices that could serve as leverage for principals at low performing schools. This list includes factors that would need to be addressed to ensure a successful application of strategies within the school when preparing students for the SSCE, such as implementing research-based strategies, maintaining a strong commitment to meeting students' academic needs, creating and maintaining a positive school climate, and leveraging highly competent teachers.

Based on the findings of this study, I conclude that high school principals can and do use effective leadership to enhance student performance and that this may subsequently lead to improved teacher professional performance. There are several implications for principal leadership from the findings of this study. First, I suggest that the school climate may be one of the ways by which high school principals might be evaluated. Second, the findings of this study illustrated how effective leadership might be used to formalize, measure, and establish a clear link between school climate and student performance. Effective leadership may be considered a bridge between learning and performance in principals' professional development. Third, I submit that improved student performance may be achieved when principals take advantage of the opportunities at their disposal and continually try to improve themselves to become

highly competent leaders who maintain a deep commitment to students' needs. The results of this study underscore the effects of the personal effort of principals to improve student performance. Fourth, effective principal leadership should be considered a vital part of professional development. Although there are other factors such as facilities, working conditions, and external forces that influence principal leadership and student performance, the results of this study suggest that positive and effective leadership may be one of the solutions for improved student performance.

Hence, researchers should explore how effective principal leadership can be used to minimize other factors that negatively affect student performance. Also, the idea of effective leadership performance may be considered proactively in concert with other performance improvement practices. Supporting analysis and interpretations of these assertions were discussed extensively in previous sections.

Confirming Knowledge from Literature

All principals in this study were the heads of their schools; however, their activities are monitored and supervised by either the board of directors of private schools or the Ministry of Education in the public and federal schools. School principals receive allocations to manage the activities of the schools and can also apply for resources outside the scope of their allocation. However, such applications are subject to the approval of the private boards or Ministry of Education. Therefore, the principal's intentions to affect teachers' expectations and approaches and student performance on the SSCE could be easily linked to an understanding of his or her perceived control of

resources, opportunities, and having the required skills for the position. Their approach to improving teaching and learning by enhancing the school climate and its attendant mechanisms underscores the behavioral intentions of the principal to positively affect academic outcomes (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Rugman & Verbeke, 2008).

The use of best practices by principals and teachers in high-performing schools lends support to the following assertions:

- A safe and orderly climate is a strong strategy through which leadership is associated with better classroom instruction and higher student achievement (Kane et al., 2010).
- When principals engage in processes that support and empower teachers to influence instruction, they increase their ability to have a positive impact on student success (Haynes et al., 1997; Pepper & Thomas, 2002).
- Most principals are characterized by their managerial capacities instead of their work to improve instruction. (Balyer et al., 2015; Nsiah & Walker, 2013; Peters & Pearce, 2012).

The school principals and teachers in high-performing schools in this study employed superior strategies through best practices such as a continuous improvement plan, collaborative decision-making, and complex database analysis of SSCE results. The principals in low-performing schools used simple tools such as SSCE result spreadsheets to share with teachers, but this effort does not adequately analyze and interpret the results.

The Wallace Foundation (2012) asserted that one of the best practices that drive the concept of leadership for learning was to manage people, data, and processes to foster school improvement. Teacher professional development opportunities at high performing schools were connected with school goals and were continually realigned and refined using data analysis tools. Since a school's goal is to increase student performance, school principals integrated some aspects of professional development with positive school climate. In addition, teachers used best practices to improve teaching and learning. Therefore, the principals and teachers at the high-performing schools successfully applied a holistic approach toward improved performance on the SSCE. In addition, the practices of the school principals and teachers in planning to promote continuous improvement in student performance were consistent with the recommendations in the literature, as school principals in high-performing schools identified and allocated resources through careful planning.

Additionally, the use of integrated processes between teacher performance and their professional development lend support to the value of knowledge-sharing resulting in the possibility of teachers developing new skills for more effective approaches (Duke & Solmonowicz, 2010). The findings of this study confirm that effective school leadership occurs when principals establish and nurture a good instructional climate and carry out sound instructional actions that foster the strong belief that all students can learn (Mendels, 2012). Further, this study is congruent with the observation that effective schools have established processes that eliminate poor teaching strategies (Krall, 2003;

Schwartz et al., 2006). The findings of this research show that the principals of the high performing schools used, in part, best practices to overcome the notable impediments to improving student performance on the SSCE, which includes (a) low family income, (b) lack of government funding, (c) inadequate classroom space, (d) high school population, (e) lack of facilities, (f) lack of professionally qualified teachers, and (g) curriculum inadequacies (see Chapter 2).

The high-performing school principals and teachers' use of student achievement data on the SSCE for discussions to improve teaching and student academic performance reflects the Sebastian and Allensworth (2012) emphases on the importance of student data in decision making. The use of student achievement data was one of the high performing schools' effective strategies for continuous improvement. This approach of linking student achievement data to teacher assessment resolved the controversy surrounding the use of data for punitive purposes and addressed any mistrust about data use for assessment (Bahadori et al., 2012; Stanley, 2007). Consequently, knowledge sharing among the teachers in high performing schools was widespread and was one of the key elements for successful teacher performance. Principals at high performing schools who experienced challenges with effectively managing their time delegated some responsibilities and used different strategies and resources to support teachers' supervision, including student feedback. This process enabled the principals to have a better picture of the teachers' classroom practices. School climate was the most cited and

fundamental reason for improved academic performance (Brown, 2004; Hoy, Hannum, & Tschannen-Moran, 1998; Lehr, 2010).

Consequently, I discovered an existing climate of excellence in high performing schools, a climate that enhanced teacher expectations and approaches such as continuous improvement culture. For instance, there was much documentation of collaborations, knowledge sharing, and high expectations about teachers and student performances among teachers and students. The findings also affirm that supporting and maintaining a positive learning climate is the most important function of a high school principal (Huesmann, 1994; Krall, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2006; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012), and school climate is directly connected to student achievement (Brown, 2004; Hoy, et al., 1998; Lehr, 2010).

The findings also showed that the principals at the high performing schools retained highly motivated teachers who were deeply concerned about student achievement and willingly shared their knowledge, which subsequently enhanced their professional performance. These findings tend to support the assertion that school climate centers on the feelings teachers and students have about their school and how it affects their behavior (Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002).

Confirming the TPB

The TPB that guided this study is congruent with some of the results (Begley, 1988; Kane, Sanduetto, & Heath, 2002). From an educational perspective, the underlying TPB view for this research is that the perception of the amount of control a principal has

over his or her behavior both explains and predicts intention and behavior when behavior is limited by factors such as lack of opportunity and skills, or is contingent on the support of others. Perceived control explains a principal's sense of having the ability and resources to perform a behavior before a plan of action will be formed (Ajzen, 1991). Furthermore, a positive intention to perform a behavior will not be formed if an individual perceives lack of control over performance, irrespective of the favorability of the attitude and subjective norm (Ajzen, 1988). Perceiving more control provides the impetus for increased behavioral performance more than does perceiving less control, whether one has a positive or negative intention. The stronger an individual's intention to perform an action, the more likely the action will be performed (Ajzen, 1991). However, the individual's control over the ability to perform the action is important, and attempting to predict a principal's behavior in affecting teachers' expectations and approaches and student performance on the SSCE requires an understanding of both the principal's intentions and his or her perceived behavior control.

Correspondingly, Stringer and Hourani (2015) suggested that schools need to foster a school climate in which learning flourishes and where the key intervening variable between leadership and student outcomes is the teacher's work. Based on this study, the high performing schools applied this concept to enhance teacher expectations and approaches and, ultimately, student performance. This was demonstrated in their use of highly effective strategies, including continuous improvement plans, collaborations to

solve problems related to student performance on the SSCE, and making data-driven decisions.

The results of this study are also congruent with the findings of Begley, (1988), Coren, (2006), Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), and Jacobs-Pollez (2012). Asserting that beliefs and attitudes are aligned with TPB, Begley contended that personal values of principals influenced their responses to the introduction of new programs in their schools.

Principals at high performing schools successfully employed practices for continuous improvement as a result of their strong intentions to improve student achievement. All principals had similar limits of having some of their initiatives subject to approval by either a board or the Ministry. However, principals with strong intentions towards instructional leadership affected student performance by affecting teachers' expectations and approaches irrespective of some shortfalls of resource availability. Consequently, the results lend support to TPB that an understanding of both the principal's intentions and perceived behavior control is necessary to predict his or her behavior in affecting teachers' expectations and approaches as well as student performance. Principals of high-performing schools encouraged and motivated teachers to improve their skills and provide differing strategies because they understood the foundational value of school climate to student achievement.

Extending Knowledge from Literature

These results extend the literature of principal leadership and school climate and support for having a positive school climate to enhance teacher expectations and

approaches in the face of negative factors that might affect student performance.

Although improved student performance is significantly associated with positive school climate, principals at low-performing schools can strategize and positively influence the climate at their schools (Algi et al., 2012; Duffy, 2012; Hallinger, 2015; Machin, 2014; Marcellus et al., 2012; Stringer & Hourani, 2015). The results also show that school principals can develop a positive school climate by using collaborative and data-supported approaches to improve teacher performance.

Principals at high performing schools employed different processes and strategies to facilitate knowledge gathering and sharing. The results of this study provide a rubric for principals to consider when creating and leveraging positive school climate. Despite their knowledge about school leadership and administration, some school principals had not heard of a continuous school improvement plan, and some had a limited view of positive school climate. These principals did not realize that some school leadership and administration practices, such as having a continuous improvement plan and fostering a positive school climate, were part of effective school leadership.

In Chapter 2 of this study, I established that leadership and positive school climate are critical to improved student achievement (Garza et al., 2014; Leo, 2015; Lopez, et al., 2012). However, events from the external forces such as the Ministry of Education and boards of directors affected principal morale. Therefore, it is important to understand how school principals can create positive school climates as strategies to minimize the negative influence of the external environment on teachers and students.

Perceptive Leadership. The concept of perceptive leadership emerges when principals demonstrate specific strategies when conducting an internal analysis of their students' performance. Prior to the analysis, the school principals at the high-performing schools developed a strong foundation of professional knowledge and positive relationships with teachers and students through collaborations, establishing psychological safety, and manifesting trust. They assured teachers and students of confidentiality and respect for their rights and exercised perceptiveness by listening to and observing teachers and students and reflecting on the analysis results with the intent of making sound judgments about teachers and student activities. Although all principals said the SSCE was a measure of academic achievement, only principals with strong intentions towards improving student performance were able to effect positive change in the face of negative perceived behavioral control. These school principals effectively used a sense of strong intentions in complex and challenging situations to make judgments as leaders.

The continuous improvement practices by principals to enhance teacher performance resulted in improved student performance and were considered congruent with effective leadership (Allen, 2015). The perceptiveness of some principals is also congruent with the concept that creating a positive school climate is their most important responsibility (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). Consequently, this study may add significantly to the professional literature about perceptive leadership.

Limitations of the Study

This research had some limitations. The purpose was to describe principals' perceptions of student performance on the Nigerian SSCE. As a result of that focus, I was limited to exploring the perceptions of principals and lead teachers, and other important forms of leadership such as distributed and shared leadership, the views of students and other constituents were not considered. This qualitative case study was limited to six principals in a large city in Nigeria who understand the importance of and administration of the SSCE. The research was limited to this area because of the schools' poor performance on the SSCE. The demographics and culture of other southern city schools may not be typical or representative of other schools in the country. However, it might be useful to compare the results of this study with different schools in other cities or areas.

Given the context of this study, data gathering and analysis could be subject to personal biases. Because the data came from human beings, it is probable that participants had personal biases that likely influenced their answers (Bansal & Corley, 2011). In recognition of this limitation, I reminded the participants to answer as accurately as they could, as nothing they said would be connected to them or to their schools or principals. Moreover, data saturation and triangulation were the basis for making sure that the sample produces valid responses. To control personal biases as the analyst, I acknowledged my expectations regarding the outcome and findings and was deliberate about looking for personal beliefs in my interpretations and conclusions that lacked solid support in the data.

While it is unknown whether rural high school principals, principals in other states, and principals with fluctuating SSCE performance would have yielded similar results as this study did, and it is plausible that the purposeful sampling procedure and the voluntary nature of the study may have significantly contributed to participant response bias. Principals in rural settings may have different perceptions than those in urban school settings. Furthermore, the results of the study may have been affected by the particular theoretical framework that was employed as the foundation for this investigation.

Recommendations

The findings are worthy of consideration for research using different research traditions to determine the extent to which these findings may be improved and made suitable for high schools. Although this research was conducted in urban high schools, it is important to understand how rural high school principals influence school climate. It would also be important to learn teachers' expectations and approaches to improving student scores on the SSCE.

The increasing numbers of high school students who fail the SSCE call for school climates that enable all students to succeed. The findings from the interviews and document reviews noted that school principals need to be better prepared to support students who are likely to perform poorly, have equitable disciplinary systems in place to address the undesirable behavior of some students, and to create specific academic programs to support SSCE preparation. School principals should develop a consciousness that enables them to engage in self-reflection to promote student performance on the

SSCE. To do this, school principals will need the support of governing boards, teachers' unions, parents, and their communities to respond to the challenge of preparing students for the SSCE and reducing the high failure rate.

Principal Professional Development Programs

With the failure rate increasing throughout the country, schools will need leaders who can create school climates where especially 12th grade students can reach their academic potential. Some of the challenges school principals experienced were creating and maintaining effective academic programs to reduce student failure on the SSCE and supporting a school climate that maintains psychological safety for all. Most principals stated that their schools had no specific programs to remediate the low achievement of slow learners, but that they intend to seek appropriate programs to assist them.

Effective principals need to know that a key responsibility of school leaders is to sustain learning, and this can best be accomplished through shared efforts. Since the very essence of school leadership professional development programs is optimum achievement for all students, it will be necessary to review leadership standards for principal roles--from managerial to instructional leadership. Professional development programs for principals should include designs that:

- provide leadership training before appointment to the post to mitigate any transition shock and facilitate their integration in the school environment in their new role;

- are continued after their appointment to support those facing the diverse challenges they may encounter. To this effect, there is a need to create a training provision once a year or after a formative evaluation where attendance is compulsory;
- planned taking into consideration the local contexts within which principals operate;
- ensure quality assurance through a central agency in charge of monitoring the quality of programs in partnerships with various organizations, universities, professional associations, and governmental agencies;
- emphasize hands-on experience for working through challenges that actually exist in their schools;
- focus on equipping them with skills for establishing student discipline, developing and maintaining a positive school culture, implementing perceptive leadership, encouraging collaboration, making data-based decisions, promoting parental involvement, communicating clearly, consistently addressing infractions, making students and teachers feel physically safe, modeling mentoring steps, and maintaining a culture of continuous school improvement;
- use results-oriented goals to monitor progress;
- include an evaluation tool by way of gathering data on student learning, and analyzing and implementing data-based decisions;

- combine theory and practice to provide strong content and relevant field experiences;
- teach strategies that can be used to foster continuous school improvement;
- offers opportunities to foster peer networking and partnerships with schools through the professional associations for principals in federal, state, and private schools.

The promising outcomes of effective school leaders in developing high-performing schools necessitates developing the leadership cadre required. Furthermore, initiatives aimed at providing the incentives and motivations principals and their teams need to raise the performance of all students are also essential.

Further Research

The proposed professional development needs further study, especially to examine more systematically the extent to which the program actually enhances principal performance, the design characteristics of the program, and the delivery modes. Research into best practices related to parents' participation in high schools should be explored relative to principal leadership for potential significant benefit to the academic performance of students. Parents' participation in high schools is complex and extends beyond the school. Activities that require parent participation in high schools includes after school programs, parent-teacher organizations, parents participating in volunteer guidance programs, and parents participating in health-based processes. Since effective principal leadership attracts the participation and interests of different stakeholders such

as parents, policymakers, teachers, students, taxpayers, and the community, it is important to consider their views, which can help shape the future of high school students. Further research is needed to learn how school principals can use best practices to enhance their strategies and select the appropriate interventions to ensure that students who are not making reasonable progress or are at risk of failure are guided into the right process or programs.

Additional research to help improve and extend the findings of this study might be learning the ways school principals are incorporating the views of parents, students, policymakers, and other community members to improve student performance and how school principals can use best practices to improve stakeholder participation to positively influence student performance. Although I have suggested that school principals share knowledge of best practices among teachers, additional research might help solidify and extend these findings, including identifying the causes and effects of knowledge sharing in support of best practices in the classroom.

Continuous school climate improvement is a long-term goal that needs further study. Since the principals did not concurrently implement all the findings of this study, the rate at which these findings may yield school improvements is yet to be determined. I recommend that researchers consider performing the same or a similar study in schools from a different city with different demographics for comparative analyses of the results. It may also be a worthy idea to pursue research on the difference between principal's managerial and instructional leadership styles.

Researchers may enhance the findings of this study by using a mixed method design and developed a tool for assessing principal leadership capabilities. School principals can use the tool to identify areas for improved leadership that may enhance instruction. Based on this idea, researchers might expand and enrich the results of this study by increasing the number of principals in a similar study. In addition, the researchers might use alternative theoretical frameworks such as the theories of action in investigating how principals make sense of their environments by constructing meanings and how these constructions in turn guide action. Finally, it may be worthwhile to pursue research on perceptive leadership to understand and assess its effects on both teacher performance and student achievement.

Implications

The results of this study have implications for school stakeholders such as families, teachers, policy makers, and the academic community. Stakeholders should gain additional understanding of principals' perceptions of student performance on the SSCE from the research findings and may seek opportunities to provide support for a principal's leadership. Alternatively, others might choose to support the principal's leadership style if it has benefited the school.

Positive Social Change: Individuals

The purpose of learning principal's perceptions of student performance on the SSCE is to improve teacher performance and ultimately student academic achievement. Learning principals' perceptions is germane to student success because leadership is

essential for improving student academic performance (Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Mendels, 2012; Spiro, 2013; Yang, 2014). Student performance improves when principals are effective (Duze, 2012; Jacobson, Johansson, & Day, 2011; Selfi, 2011). Therefore, understanding principals' perceptions may provide a possible strategy for improving both teacher instruction and student performance. When students achieve passing scores on the SSCE, they may realize their ambitions to attend university, improve their chances of not using drugs, and look forward to greater opportunities for significant future accomplishments.

The findings of this study are important for teachers because applying the findings may suggest additional ways to help teachers improve their teaching skills. In this study, I suggested that policy makers, principals, and administrators play important roles in encouraging teachers through facilitating the appropriate strategies, structures, best practices, and the appropriate environment needed to help them be effective instructors of their students. Teachers have a more positive influence on their professional efficacy when they have a larger repertoire of knowledge strategies (Brookover et al., 1978; Hoy, 1990; Lindahl, 2006; Van Houtte, 2005).

High school principals may have the opportunity to increase their legitimacy when they apply the results of this research in their schools to improve student performance on the SSCE. When that occurs, they will strengthen the perception of their legitimacy and build renewed confidence in their ability and their support from

stakeholders (Furney, Hasazi, Clark, Keefe, & Hartnett, 2003). In addition, they can create an environment to help improve teacher expectations and approaches.

Positive Social Change: Families

The purpose of studying principals' perceptions was to learn about and improve their leadership, because leadership and positive school climate are necessary for improved student academic performance. Teacher expectations and approaches are achieved when principals' perceptions of student performance on the SSCE are strong and positive (McCreight & Salinas, 2013; Moss, 2013). Therefore, learning principal's perceptions of student performance on the SSCE may be a possible strategy to improve teaching and, subsequently, student performance. When academic performance of students on the SSCE improves, families will realize their investment in a high school education, chances for success will increase, and the possibility of a better quality of life will be increased.

Positive Social Change: Organizations

It can be deduced from the findings that effective principal leadership is essential for good student performance on the SSCE. This knowledge should guide policy makers in making education decisions and increase the possibility that they will pass legislation to ensure a climate of trust and psychological safety. These social changes will require the redesign of organizational systems in high schools to accommodate necessary changes, including their levels of integration. Application of the findings may facilitate (a) improvement in teacher approaches that lead to increased chances for student

academic success, (b) hiring and retaining better teachers and principals, and (c) creating a more proactive school climate.

Positive Social Change: Society

Finally, this study is significant because of its potential to stimulate social change through the experiences of those directly involved in school leadership. In the findings of this study, I have identified one of the most significant errors in principal leadership: the lack of application of best practices to create a school climate that supports and encourages learning. This finding implies that certain aspects of school programs and systems, such as positive school climate, may require a redesign to make accommodations for effective collaboration. For example, to establish effective collaboration, high schools may need a knowledge base to help capture reflections on positive school climate research and new knowledge generated during collaboration. Additionally, professional development leaders might have access to and will encourage using principal leadership knowledge bases for training purposes.

Conclusions

The primary purpose of a school is student learning. Effective school leaders give highest priority to that purpose and personally and frequently monitor the teaching programs, put time and energy into student learning and school improvement, support the staff involved with learning programs, and emphasize instructional leadership. The principal has a key role in developing the school's culture and climate. Leadership that focuses on the quality of teaching is essential for maintaining and supporting

improvement in the quality of learning, and student outcomes are more likely to improve when leadership is effective and when teachers are empowered in their spheres of influence and expertise.

Required principal leadership qualities are the ability to create a student-centered learning environment, provide guidance about pedagogy, and manifest support for teaching and learning. The influence of pedagogy and school climate on learner engagement will, in turn, result in students describing their learning as transformative for them as individuals. The school climate affects the quality and degree of students' interest and engagement with learning as well as their ability to transition smoothly from high school to their next educational level. Furthermore, it may positively affect student development of the resilience that will enable them to adapt to diverse situations in their adult lives and contribute meaningfully to the larger society. Effective principal leadership in Nigeria will require a collaborative approach in which the commitment and participation of all school stakeholders are part of the process.

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Appendix A: Principals' Perceptions of Student Performance on the SSCE

Interview Guide for Principals

Time of interview: _____

Date: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____ Pseudonym:

Hello. I am Comfort Oghu. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. (Briefly, describe the research). The purpose of this interview is to understand, from your perspective, your experiences when your school is preparing students for the SSCE. Your responses will be kept confidential. You do not have to answer any question you wish during this interview.

1. How long have you been serving as a principal at this school?
2. What are your views on the performance of students during the last two years at the SSCE examination?
3. What factors do you think are responsible for this performance?
4. What do you think is the significance of the SSCE to students and the school?
5. How does students' performance at this examination pave way for the future accomplishments?
6. How does the school communicate the importance of this examination?
7. How do teachers and students feel about their school?
8. What can you attribute this feeling to?
9. How do you contribute to students' academic performance as the school principal?
10. How do you affect teachers' expectations and approaches to the instructional program?
11. How do you involve teachers and students in school programs?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add that would help me understand your views when working to prepare students for the SSCE?

Thank you again for participating in this interview. Your information will be kept confidential. I will schedule a follow-up interview with you to review your responses and to check for accuracy.

Appendix B: Principals' Perceptions of Student Performance on the SSCE

Interview Guide for Lead Teachers' Focus Group

Time of interview: _____

Date: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewees: _____ Pseudonym: _____

Hello. I am Comfort Oghu. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. (Briefly describe the research). The purpose of this interview is to understand, from your perspective, your principal's perceptions when your school is preparing students for the SSCE. Your responses will be kept confidential. Please respect the privacy of the other participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others. You do not have to answer any question you wish during this interview.

1. What do you think of SSCE results in your school?
2. To what extent do you think the students' performance on the SSCE in your school has improved over the years?
3. To what extent do you think the present principal has taken an initiative to improve the climate if the school SSCE?
4. In what ways have your expectations been met towards the performance of students on the SSCE since he/she became principal?
5. To what extent do you have the opportunity to use feedback from previous SSCE performance to improve students' learning experiences as they prepare for the SSCE?
6. To what extent do you make suggestions on how your principal can support you to improve the school's performance on the SSCE?
7. Is there anything else you would like to add that would help me understand how you feel when working to prepare students for the SSCE?

Thank you again for participating in this interview. Your information will be kept confidential.

Appendix C: Letter of Request and Permission to Conduct Lead Teachers Focus

Group Interviews and Document Review

Date

The Principal

Street Address

City, State,

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am Comfort Oghu, a doctoral student in leadership, policy, and change in education at Walden University USA. I am working on a research study to describe the experiences of high school principals when their students prepare for the senior secondary certificate examination.

The results of the study will be published in ProQuest. No names or anything that could identify the prospective participants will be included in any of the published materials. All data will be kept confidential and anonymous. All information will be stored and locked in a protected location.

I would like to request your permission to conduct a focus group interview session with eight lead teachers and review school documents such as the SSCE WAEC Computer Sheets for the past two years, policy statements, logbook, organizational chart, announcements, and minutes of staff meetings as part of my data collection process. I will review any relevant information from these documents before leaving the school. I will also make copies of some documents for analysis and cross-checking, which will be free of students' identifiers.

Feel free to contact me at xxxxxxxx or xxxxxxx if you have any questions or concerns about the study or regarding your approval after you have gone through this permission letter

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant approval, please sign a letter of approval and return to me in the enclosed envelope.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Comfort Oghu

PhD Student

Leadership, Policy, and Change in Education

Walden University

USA

Appendix D: Letter of Request and Permission to the Ministry of Education

Principals' Perceptions of Students' Performance on the Nigerian Senior Secondary Certificate Examination

Date

Name of Director

Ministry of Education

Street Address

City, State,

Dear Director,

I am a doctoral student in Leadership, Policy, and Change in Education at Walden University USA. I am working on a research study to describe the experiences of high school principals when their students prepare for the senior secondary certificate examination. I am particularly interested in high school principals who are: a) currently working in a private, state, or federal government school, b) currently working in senior secondary schools approved by government to register and prepare students for the senior school certificate examination, and c) has three or more years of SSCE administration experience in their current schools.

The results of the study will be published in ProQuest. No names or anything that could identify the prospective participants will be included in any of the published materials. All data will be kept confidential and anonymous. All information will be stored and locked in a protected location.

I would like to request information such as: the names of present incumbent principals of high schools in the state, the duration of each principal in his or her respective school, an analysis of SSCE performance in the state for the past 2 years

I will review any relevant information from these documents before leaving your office. I will also make copies of some documents without the school identifiers for analysis and cross checking. The confidentiality of the information accessed will be strictly maintained.

Feel free to contact me at xxxxxxxx or xxxxxxx if you have any questions or concerns about the study or regarding your approval after you have gone through this permission letter.

Thank you for considering my request. If you chose to grant approval, please sign a letter of approval and return to me in the enclosed envelop.

Thank you very much

Sincerely,

Comfort Oghu
Ph.D. Student
Leadership, Policy, and Change in Education
Walden University USA

Appendix E: NIH Certificate



Appendix F: Continuous School Improvement Plan for School D

Plan 1: Enhancement of students' ability to engage in experiential learning.					
Action plan	Timeline	Logistics	Person(s) responsible	Evaluation Tools	
				Supporting documentation	Evidence of impact on students
1. Students are challenged to be research minded and to be at the forefront of their own learning. They are required to take the learning experience outside the bounds of their classrooms by interacting with other minds around the world.	Oct 18,2013- Nov 18, 2018	Internet facility (already in operation)	Heads of department	Acceptance of registration with Global Schools Connect project.	Student presentations Progress assessment forms Audience feedback during presentations Assessment reports by British council Assessment by partner schools
2. Student Peer Mentorship and Scaffolding. Programs - High performing students with exemplary character. These students assist underperforming students, offering support and motivation.	2011- 2018 Evaluated twice per each half trimester throughout entire school year	High-performing students voluntarily participate as part of community service.	Student support staff	Awards, certificates, and trophies. Student leadership courses	Student results analyses. Award ceremonies. Parent feedback. Student feedback