

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AS A STRATEGY FOR ENHANCING PERFORMANCE IN BAYELSA STATE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Julius LAYE

Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Nigeria
juliuslaye43@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: The study examined effective communication as a strategy for enhancing performance in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education. Three research questions guide the study. The research design for this study is the descriptive research design. The study's population comprised all the staff of the State Ministry of Education. Since the exact number of staff in the ministry is not available, a purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 146 staff from the Ministry. The instruments for data collection were questionnaires named the "Effective Communication as a Strategy to Enhancing Performance Questionnaire (ECSEPQ)," which were developed by the researcher. The questionnaires consisted of three sections. Section A collected demographic data, and section B addressed the various research questions using a 4-point Likert rating scale with the options Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) with values of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The instrument was validated and its reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha, and the result yielded a .82 coefficient, indicating that the instrument is reliable. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, and the hypotheses were tested using an Independent t-test at a 0.05 level of significance with the aid of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0. The study revealed that effective communication is a crucial strategy for enhancing performance in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education, as it fosters a culture of transparency, trust, and collaboration, leading to improved employee motivation, teamwork, and productivity. The study concluded that effective communication emerges as a vital strategy for enhancing performance in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education. Based on the findings, the study recommended among others that the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education should adopt a more modern and innovative approach to communication, such as digital communication platforms and social media, to enhance the effectiveness of its current communication strategies.

Keywords: Effective Communication, Strategy, Performance.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Laye, J. (2024). Effective communication as a strategy for enhancing performance in Bayelsa State Ministry of Education. *International Journal of Leadership, Quality Education and African Development*, 1(2), 194-205.

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INTRODUCTION

The education sector plays a pivotal role in shaping the socio-economic development and future of any society. In Nigeria's federal system, the State ministries of education bear significant responsibility for implementing educational policies, managing educational resources, and ensuring the delivery of quality education at the state level (Igwebueze, 2024). The Bayelsa State Ministry of Education, established following the creation of the State in 1996, is tasked with overseeing and coordinating educational activities across the State. However, like many public sector organizations in developing nations, the ministry faces numerous challenges that affect its

operational efficiency and overall performance. Communication serves as the vital link between organizational goals and performance in educational administration.

Communication, as a fundamental organizational process, serves as the backbone of any institution's operations and success. It encompasses the transmission of information, ideas, attitudes, and emotions from one person or group to another (Dar et al., 2019). In the context of educational administration, effective communication facilitates coordination, enhances decision-making processes, promotes stakeholder engagement, and drives organizational performance (Anele, 2023). The quality and effectiveness of communication within an educational ministry can significantly impact its ability to achieve its mandates and serve its constituents effectively.

The Bayelsa State Ministry of Education operates within a complex system involving multiple stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, students, parents, community leaders, and other government agencies. The ministry's responsibilities span policy formulation and implementation, curriculum development and review, teacher training and development, education infrastructure development and management, education financing and budgeting, quality assurance and accreditation student assessment and evaluation, education research and development, public engagement and awareness educational technology and digital literacy, school safety and security, community engagement and partnership, technology and resource allocation across the primary, secondary, and tertiary education levels. These diverse functions require robust communication systems and strategies to ensure smooth operations and optimal performance.

Historical evidence suggests that public sector organizations in Nigeria, including state ministries of education, often struggle with communication-related challenges (Agu et al., 2022). These challenges manifest in various forms, such as information gaps between different hierarchical levels, delayed decision-making processes, poor feedback mechanisms, and inadequate stakeholder engagement. The situation in Bayelsa State is particularly noteworthy given its unique geographical terrain, characterized by riverine areas and scattered settlements, which can complicate physical communication and coordination efforts.

The emergence of modern communication technologies and management practices has created new opportunities and challenges for public sector organizations. While these technologies offer potential solutions for improving communication efficiency, their effective integration into existing organizational structures and processes requires careful consideration and strategic planning (Lovari & Valentini, 2020). Like other public institutions, the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education must navigate these technological changes while maintaining its core functions and meeting stakeholder expectations. It has to therefore, adapt its strengths and weakness to take advantage of the numerous contemporary communication strategies it is faced with to drive organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

Research indicates that organizations with well-structured communication systems tend to demonstrate higher levels of employee engagement, improved service delivery, and better achievement of organizational objectives (Mbhele, 2016). Effective communication has been linked to improved policy implementation, better resource utilization, and enhanced educational outcomes in the education sector. Understanding the relationship between effective communication and organizational performance is particularly relevant given the state's educational development goals. As the ministry strives to improve educational standards and outcomes, the role of effective communication in facilitating these improvements cannot be overlooked.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the critical importance of effective communication in organizational success, the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education appears to face significant communication challenges that hamper its performance and service delivery. These challenges manifest in various ways, including delays in policy implementation, inefficient information flow between departments, and gaps in stakeholder engagement. The hierarchical structure of the ministry often creates communication bottlenecks, leading to delayed decision-making and reduced operational efficiency. There is also a noticeable disconnect between the ministry's central administration and its field offices, resulting in inconsistent policy interpretation and implementation across different educational zones. The lack of standardized communication protocols and modern communication infrastructure further compounds these issues, particularly in reaching schools in remote riverine areas of the state.

Additionally, feedback mechanisms between the ministry and its various stakeholders appear inadequate, limiting the organization's ability to respond effectively to emerging educational challenges. The absence of clear channels for bottom-up communication often results in valuable insights from frontline educators being lost or delayed in reaching decision-makers. It is against this premise that this study examines effective communication as a strategy for enhancing performance in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education. The specific objectives are to determine the current communication strategies in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education, how effective communication enhances employee performance, and the challenges to effective communication as a strategy in enhancing performance in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education

Research Questions

The following questions were raised to guide the study:

- What are the current communication strategies in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education?
- How does effective communication influence employee performance in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education?
- What are the challenges to effective communication as a strategy in enhancing performance in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Systems Theory

The general systems theory was proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, a biologist in 1968, to explain the relationship between the parts and the whole of living organisms (Weckowicz in Dishon-Brown, 2019). Bertalanffy's general system theory aims to provide a unified framework for understanding complex systems across various disciplines. His work focused on identifying common patterns and principles that apply to all systems, regardless of their nature (physical, biological and social, etc). He stressed the importance of considering systems as integrated wholes, rather than just focusing on their individual components. General system theory has been

influential in communication studies, offering a framework to analyze complex communication system. It helps to provide a holistic perspective which encourages researchers to consider communication as a whole system comprising interconnected components (e.g. sender, messenger, channel, receiver, feedback).

It also highlights the interdependence of these components, demonstrating how changes in one part of the system affect other part. Since then the theory has been used in academic fields such as psychology, history, and physiology. Studies conducted by theorists in the field of management expose a digression from the classical and human relations models. Von Bertalanffy, L. (2010), added that the systems theory has a more valid and applicable stance in internal communication. This is because the systems approach recognizes the role that communication plays in facilitating efficient functioning between the various components of organizations.

In organizational communication research, some main components of the systems theory have been identified that inform how effective communication leads to employee productivity, namely; wholeness, hierarchy, and feedback. In systems theory, the whole determines the character and functions of parts (Weckowicz in Dishon-Brown, 2019). Wholeness refers to the interdependence of the various elements that constitute the system. This means that individual parts of a system contribute to the existence of the organization. One of GST's most distinctive features is its universal applicability. The theory aims to explain the behaviour of complex, organized systems across all domains, from simple mechanical devices like thermostats to highly complex biological and social systems like families (Javanmardi et al., 2020).

This universality is reflected in its goal of building concepts, postulates, principles, and theorems that can be applied across all fields of study. GST goes beyond being merely a theoretical framework; it represents a unique worldview or *Weltanschauung* that requires "systems thinking." This approach involves viewing the world as an interconnected web where objects and phenomena cannot be fully understood in isolation. Instead, understanding comes from examining the relationships and interactions between system components and their environment. Musheke (2021) asserted that systems theory operates from primary principles of inter-relatedness and interdependence, thus it can be said that the same basic principles form the basis from which communication audit occurs. Bayelsa State Ministry of Education has both linear and hierarchical structures with the various sections functioning as a whole and all the staff working towards a common goal.

The systems theory is therefore appropriate for this study. Given this, the researchers would determine the effectiveness of communication as a critical tool leading to employee performance and describe the communication systems at Bayelsa State Ministry of Education. The organization comprises different sections and to achieve organizational goals, these sections or departments need to work together in harmony to achieve these objectives. This means that there should be effective vertical internal communication between the management and staff of the various departments as well as horizontal between departments of the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education to attain these goals.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Effective Communication

Communication is the life wire of the human race. In all dimensions of social life, both in the formal and informal settings, Communication is what drives relationships within the society. In an educational organization like other fields, good communication is crucial in attaining vital goals and objectives. However, in examining effective communication, it is important to define communication is the process of creating, conveying and exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, feelings and messages between individuals, groups or organizations through a common system of symbols, signs or behaviour. Meaningful communication informs and educates employees at all levels and motivates them to support the organization's strategy (Barrett, 2012). Communication is viewed by Haiemann (2011) as the imparting of ideas and making oneself understood by others. It is also the process by which information is passed between individuals and or organizations using previously agreed symbols. Communication is the process by which one party (a sender) transmits information (i.e. message).

Musheke (2021) defined communication as the transmission and reception of ideas, feelings, and attitudes verbally or non-verbally to produce a favourable response. Communication is the process by which information is exchanged and understood by two or more people usually to motivate or influence behaviour. Communication refers to the exchange of information between a sender (source) and a receiver (destination) so that it is received, understood, and leads to action (Nweke & Asita, 2022). Furthermore, communication is the process that involves all acts of transmitting messages to channels that link people to the languages and symbols that are used to transmit such messages (Bonvillain, 2019). It is also how such messages are received and stored. It includes the rules, customs, and conventions that define and regulate human relationships and events.

Effective communication on the other hand is a process by which the sender of a message, receives feedback from the recipient receiver as intended (Peter, 2015). It is a two-way process that involves conveying and receiving information, ideas, thoughts, and messages in a clear accurate and timely manner. Effective communication starts from the sender to the receiver. It is said to be ineffective communication when the receiver of the message does not decode the intention of the sender. Effective communication occurs when we have in place a clear purpose, accurate transmission, relevant audience, appropriate channel, timely delivery, feedback mechanism and mutual understanding.

It is through the feedback mechanism that communication achieves its desired results. According to Toluwase (2021), effective communication takes place when the person to whom it is intended, subsequently, the receiver understands the meaning intended and reacts accordingly. Effective communication is a transaction of ideas, directories, and commands guided into oral or written words, or actions on the path of the communicator in such a way that the receiver gets the same message and reacts in a manner envisaged by the communicator. It is believed by a lot of experts that communication could take place, consciously or unconsciously by writing, reading, talking, listening, or moving any part of the body.

Current Communication Strategies in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education

The Bayelsa State Ministry of Education employs several key communication strategies to engage with stakeholders and manage educational initiatives:

- Direct stakeholder engagement through meetings with school administrators and teachers: These sessions serve as platforms for discussing policy changes, addressing concerns, and gathering feedback on educational programs (Basil et al., 2024).
- Traditional media channels (radio and newspaper announcements): to disseminate important information about school calendars, examination schedules, and policy updates. This approach ensures information reaches communities across both urban and rural areas (James, 2013).
- Internal communication via memos and circulars: This formal documentation network ensures consistent policy implementation and maintains clear administrative records across all schools under the ministry's supervision (Wigwe, 2015).
- Community outreach programs and visits: to discuss educational initiatives and gather input from community leaders and families. This grassroots approach helps build trust and ensures educational policies align with community needs (Teibowei, 2023).

Effective Communication and Employee Performance

Effective communication significantly influences employee performance across all organizational levels. Clear communication creates a foundation of understanding between management and employees, enabling workers to grasp their roles, responsibilities, and organizational expectations fully (Ogunsola et al., 2024). When employees understand precisely what is expected of them, they can align their efforts with company goals more effectively. Open and transparent communication fosters a positive work environment where employees feel valued and heard. When managers maintain regular dialogue with their team members, it creates opportunities for timely feedback, constructive criticism, and recognition of achievements. This ongoing exchange helps employees refine their skills, correct mistakes promptly, and maintain motivation to perform at their best.

Moreover, effective communication builds trust and strengthens relationships within the workplace. When employees trust their supervisors and colleagues, they're more likely to be engaged, committed, and motivated to perform well (Chakraborty & Ganguly, 2019). This trust creates a supportive environment where employees feel secure enough to take calculated risks and push their boundaries to achieve better results. Additionally, clear communication channels help reduce workplace stress and anxiety. When employees have access to necessary information and can freely discuss challenges with their supervisors, they're better equipped to handle work-related pressures and maintain high-performance levels. This emotional security and clarity enable workers to focus on their tasks rather than worry about miscommunications or unclear expectations.

The Challenges to Effective Communication as a Strategy in Enhancing Performance

- **Language and Cultural Barriers:** Workers from different backgrounds may interpret messages differently, leading to misunderstandings and errors in task execution that affect overall performance (Agrawal, 2012).
- **Information Overload:** Too much information through multiple channels (emails, meetings, messages) overwhelms employees, making it difficult to identify and act on important tasks effectively (Ajibade & Mutula, 2020).
- **Poor Feedback Mechanisms:** Lack of proper channels for employees to give and receive feedback creates gaps in understanding expectations and limits opportunities for performance improvement (Ndambiri, 2015).
- **Technological Issues:** Technical problems with communication tools and platforms disrupt information flow, causing decision-making and task completion delays that impact productivity (Ashari et al., 2014).

METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study is the descriptive research design. The study's population comprised all the staff from the State Ministry of Education. Since the exact number of staff in the ministry is not available, a purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 146 staff from the Ministry. This technique was chosen to ensure that the sample is representative of the various departments and job roles within the ministry. The instruments for data collection were questionnaires named the "Effective Communication as a Strategy to Enhancing Performance Questionnaire (ECSEPQ)," which were developed by the researcher. Both questionnaires consisted of three sections. Section A collected demographic data, and section B addressed the various research questions using a 4-point Likert rating scale with the options Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) with values of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The instrument was validated and its reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha, and the result yielded a 0.82 coefficient, indicating that the instrument is reliable. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions with the aid of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0. However, 146 questionnaires were administered, and after two weeks, a total of 133 (88.9%) copies of questionnaires were retrieved as valid and used for the analysis.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the current communication strategies in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education?

Table 1: Showed Descriptive Statistics on the current communication strategies in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education

| | Items | N | Mean | SD. | Decision |
|-------------------|--|-----|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1. | Direct stakeholder engagement through meetings with school administrators and teachers | 133 | 2.43 | 1.15 | Agree |
| 2. | Traditional media channels (radio and newspaper announcements) | 133 | 2.91 | 0.85 | Agree |
| 3. | Internal communication via memos and circulars | 133 | 3.01 | 1.21 | Agree |
| 4. | Community outreach programs and visits | 133 | 2.75 | 0.92 | Agree |
| Grand mean | | 133 | 2.77 | 1.03 | Agree |

Research question one analyzed what are the current communication strategies in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education. The analysis shows a grand mean score of 2.77 (Grand Mean Score: 2.77 ± 1.03) which is higher than the criterion mean of 2.50 indicating that the current communication strategies in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education are effective. The result implies that the respondents generally perceive the existing communication strategies as being somewhat satisfactory. However, since the mean score is not extremely high, it also indicates that there is still room for improvement in the communication strategies employed by the ministry.

Research Question 2: How does effective communication influence employee performance in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education?

Table 2: Showed Descriptive Statistics on how effective communication influences employee performance in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education.

| | Items | N | Mean | SD. | Remark |
|-------------------|--|-----|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| 5. | Clear communication helps employees understand roles and goals | 133 | 2.951 | 1.021 | Agree |
| 6. | Regular feedback improves skills and motivation | 133 | 3.219 | .789 | Agree |
| 7. | Open communication boosts teamwork and productivity | 133 | 2.853 | .951 | Agree |
| 8. | Strong communication builds trust and reduces stress | 133 | 2.682 | 1.102 | Agree |
| Grand Mean | | | 2.927 | .965 | Agree |

Research question two states how effective communication influences employee performance in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education. The analysis shows a grand mean score of 2.92 (Grand Mean Score: $2.92 \pm .96$) which is higher than the criterion mean of 2.50 indicating that effective communication has a positive influence on employee performance in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education. The result revealed that the respondents generally agree that effective communication plays a significant role in enhancing employee performance. This implies that when communication is effective, employees are more likely to be motivated, engaged, and productive, leading to improved overall performance. The result indicates that the ministry's employees recognize the importance of effective communication in driving their performance, and therefore, efforts to improve communication strategies and practices are likely to have a positive impact on employee performance.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges to effective communication as a strategy for enhancing performance in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education?

Table 3: Showed Descriptive Statistics for the challenges to effective communication as a strategy for enhancing performance.

| Items | | N | Mean | SD. | Remark |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|-----|-------------|-------------|--------|
| 9. | Language and Cultural Barriers | 133 | 3.201 | 0.876 | Agree |
| 10. | Information Overload | 133 | 2.951 | 1.043 | Agree |
| 11. | Poor Feedback Mechanisms | 133 | 3.019 | 1.129 | Agree |
| 12. | Technological Issues | 133 | 2.959 | 0.964 | Agree |
| Grand Mean | | 133 | 3.03 | 1.00 | Agree |

Research question three analyses what are the challenges to effective communication as a strategy for enhancing performance in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education. The analysis shows a grand mean score of 3.03 (Grand Mean Score: 3.03 ± 1.00) which is higher than the criterion mean of 2.50 indicating that language and cultural barriers, information overload, poor feedback mechanisms and technological issues are significant challenges to effective communication in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education. The result revealed that the respondents strongly agree that these challenges hinder effective communication and, by extension, impact employee performance. The result implies that language and cultural barriers, information overload, poor feedback mechanisms, and technological issues are prevalent in the ministry and pose a substantial threat to the successful implementation of effective communication strategies. Therefore, the ministry needs to address these challenges by developing targeted solutions, such as language training, information management systems, regular feedback sessions, and investment in reliable technology, to overcome these obstacles and foster a more effective communication environment.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Current Communication Strategies

The findings of this study revealed that the current communication strategies in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education use direct stakeholder engagement, traditional media channels, internal communication via memos, and community outreach programs. While these approaches are generally well-received, there is room for improvement. The ministry can build on this foundation by enhancing the frequency, content, and inclusivity of its communication strategies to better serve stakeholders and promote education-related initiatives. This will help to increase the effectiveness of their communication efforts and ultimately improve employee performance.

Influence of Effective Communication on Employee Performance

The results of this study revealed that effective communication has a positive influence on employee performance in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education. Clear communication helps employees understand roles and goals, while regular feedback improves skills and motivation. Open communication boosts teamwork and productivity, and strong communication builds trust

and reduces stress. The findings suggest that effective communication is essential for employee success and job satisfaction and that the ministry's employees recognize its importance in enhancing their performance. This highlights the need for the ministry to prioritize effective communication.

Challenges to Effective Communication

The study revealed that effective communication has a positive influence on employee performance in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education. This indicates that clear and timely communication is crucial for employee success. Effective communication helps employees understand their roles and goals, and regular feedback improves their skills and motivation. As a result, open communication boosts teamwork and productivity, while strong communication builds trust and reduces stress, ultimately enhancing employee performance and job satisfaction. Prioritizing effective communication is essential for the ministry to optimize employee performance. It is a key driver of success.

CONCLUSION

Effective communication emerges as a vital strategy for enhancing performance in the Bayelsa State Ministry of Education. The research reveals that clear and timely communication is essential for employee success and job satisfaction, ultimately driving performance. The ministry can foster a culture of transparency, trust, and collaboration, leading to improved teamwork, productivity, and employee motivation when they prioritize effective communication. The Ministry can also adopt innovative communication approaches, address challenges such as language barriers and technological issues, and provide regular feedback to employees as well as optimize employee performance to achieve its goals, and ultimately improve the quality of education in Bayelsa State. Effective communication is thus a critical lever for unlocking the ministry's full potential and driving success in the education sector. This strategy is crucial for the ministry's growth.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- The Bayelsa State Ministry of Education should adopt a more modern and innovative approach to communication, such as digital communication platforms and social media, to enhance the effectiveness of its current communication strategies.
- The Bayelsa State Ministry of Education should prioritize regular feedback and open communication to build trust and reduce stress among employees, and to enhance employee performance and job satisfaction.
- The Bayelsa State Ministry of Education should invest in reliable technology, such as digital communication platforms and collaboration tools, to address the challenges of effective communication, including language and cultural barriers, information overload, and technological issues.

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