

SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR THE LIFELONG VIABILITY OF PRIVATE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

¹Veronica Egonekwu Mogboh, Ph.D. And ²Eneh Nnamdi Sunday Ph.D.

Article Info

Keywords: Private educational institutions, Sustainable educational management, Professional management, Financial planning, Succession planning.

DOI

10.5281/zenodo.15706538

Abstract

In Nigeria, the private educational sector has witnessed an exponential growth in the number of institutions, with many owners perceiving school ownership as a lucrative business opportunity. However, the sustainability of these institutions has remained a major concern due to various challenges such as lack of professional management, poor succession planning, financial instability, and a shortage of trained personnel. This research explores effective educational management practices aimed at ensuring the long-term viability of private educational institutions in Nigeria. Through an examination of prevailing issues and strategic solutions, this paper proposes a framework for sustainable management that includes professionalization, financial planning, leadership succession, and the development of a robust education system. The ultimate aim is to identify actionable strategies to mitigate the challenges and ensure the growth and continuity of private schools, especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has further exacerbated existing issues.

Introduction

The educational landscape in Nigeria has witnessed remarkable growth in recent years, with a significant increase in the number of private schools across the country. This rise in private educational institutions is often seen as a response to the growing demand for quality education, as parents and students alike seek alternatives to the public education system. The private sector has flourished, and many individuals and organizations have ventured into school ownership, viewing it as both a profitable and socially responsible endeavor. However, while the expansion of private schools is indicative of a thriving sector, it raises crucial questions about the sustainability and long-term viability of these institutions, especially in the face of various operational and management challenges.

Private schools in Nigeria are often established by entrepreneurs or families, which can sometimes lead to a lack of professional management structures. Family-run schools are often heavily reliant on the vision and leadership of the founders, which can pose significant challenges when the founder passes away or is no longer able to manage the school. Succession planning, in many cases, is poorly executed or entirely absent. This absence of a clear plan for leadership succession often results in the dissolution of the school's core values, mission, and

^{1,2}Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Godfrey Okoye University Enugu.

E-mail: nekwuvero@yahoo.ca, enehsunday5@gmail.com

educational standards (Owolabi & Agboola, 2020). When the successor lacks the same vision, commitment, or skill set as the founder, the school's future is placed at risk, further undermining its sustainability. This is particularly evident in family-run schools, where the next generation may not have the same dedication to educational management, leading to leadership struggles and, in some cases, the eventual collapse of the institution (Mogboh et al., 2022).

Financial challenges also pose a significant threat to the survival of private schools. Many private schools in Nigeria operate on a narrow margin, primarily relying on tuition fees as their main source of revenue. This makes them vulnerable to changes in student enrollment, which can fluctuate due to economic conditions, societal factors, or external events such as the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic exacerbated these financial vulnerabilities as schools were forced to close for extended periods, resulting in a sharp decline in tuition revenue (Mogboh, Ene, Uzochukwu, & Obi, 2022). The financial strain during the pandemic led to several private schools being unable to meet basic operational costs, including paying staff salaries and maintaining school facilities. As a result, many teachers resigned or were laid off, and many students withdrew from private institutions due to concerns about the school's ability to provide a stable educational environment. The financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the fragility of many private schools' financial models and brought to light the need for stronger financial planning and management practices.

In addition to financial instability, private schools in Nigeria also face issues related to student enrollment. With the increasing number of private schools, competition for students has intensified. Some schools attempt to attract students by lowering fees, which can lead to financial strain as the schools struggle to cover their operational costs. On the other hand, schools that attempt to maintain or increase their fees may find themselves losing students to more affordable institutions (Ifedi, 2022). The issue of low student enrollment is also compounded by Nigeria's economic challenges, where many families are unable to afford private school tuition, especially in the face of inflation and rising living costs. The lack of enrollment stability, combined with poor financial management, can place private schools in a precarious position, with the risk of not being able to meet their financial obligations and, ultimately, their inability to sustain operations.

A related challenge is the lack of professionally trained educational leaders. Effective leadership is crucial for the success of any institution, especially educational ones. However, many private schools in Nigeria are led by individuals who may have little or no formal training in educational management or administration. In many cases, school founders may be entrepreneurial in nature but lack the necessary skills to run a school effectively. This gap in professional leadership often results in poor decision-making, inadequate resource allocation, and a lack of strategic vision, all of which contribute to the school's eventual downfall (Mogboh et al., 2022). Leadership in private schools is often synonymous with the owner or founder, and this centralized control can lead to inefficiencies. Without a professional leadership structure or a clear organizational framework, the school may struggle to adapt to changing educational standards, integrate new technologies, and provide a quality learning experience for students.

Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has intensified the challenges faced by private schools in Nigeria. The pandemic forced the temporary closure of schools, disrupting the education of millions of students and leading to a sharp decline in student enrollment. Many private schools were ill-prepared to adapt to remote learning, and the prolonged closure led to significant financial losses for many institutions. Schools that were already financially struggling found it nearly impossible to recover from the prolonged periods of closure. The pandemic also disrupted the ability of schools to maintain consistent teacher-student engagement, and the sudden shift to online learning highlighted the lack of technological infrastructure in many private schools. The ability of private schools to sustain themselves through such a global crisis was further hindered by their lack of financial reserves, inadequate planning, and dependence on tuition fees for survival (Mogboh et al., 2022).

The combined effect of these factors has led to a situation where many private schools in Nigeria struggle to maintain their relevance, quality, and financial viability. For many school owners, the idea of running a school is seen as a profitable business venture rather than a lifelong investment in educational development. This mindset can undermine the long-term sustainability of these institutions, as school management practices may not align

with the demands of running an educational establishment that requires continuous professional development, strategic planning, and long-term financial stability.

To ensure the sustainability of private educational institutions in Nigeria, it is essential to adopt strategies that address these issues in a holistic manner. The importance of professional management, financial planning, leadership development, and succession planning cannot be overstated. Additionally, addressing the lack of qualified educational leaders and providing a clear vision for the future of private schools can significantly improve their chances of thriving in the long run.

Key Challenges in the Sustainability of Private Educational Institutions

Private educational institutions in Nigeria, while contributing significantly to the nation's educational landscape, face a number of challenges that threaten their long-term viability. These challenges stem from a range of issues, including poor management practices, inadequate succession planning, financial instability, declining student enrollment, and difficulties in retaining qualified teachers. Each of these factors has a profound impact on the operational efficiency, financial sustainability, and overall growth potential of these institutions. In addressing these challenges, it is essential for school owners, policymakers, and educational stakeholders to implement measures that not only safeguard the survival of private institutions but also ensure they remain competitive and continue to offer quality education to the nation's students.

1. Lack of Professional Management

The lack of professional management in many private schools in Nigeria is one of the most pressing challenges to the sustainability of these institutions. A substantial number of private school owners in Nigeria treat their institutions as family-run businesses. While this approach may have worked during the early stages of the school's establishment, it often leads to inefficiencies and a lack of strategic foresight. Many school owners, particularly those who established the institutions themselves, lack the necessary professional management skills or educational leadership training to navigate the complexities of running a modern school system (Moses & Okorie, 2021).

In the absence of professional managers, schools often operate without structured systems for administration, financial management, and long-term planning. This can result in poor decision-making, failure to adhere to educational standards, and a lack of accountability. For example, decisions regarding the hiring of staff, implementation of curriculum changes, and resource allocation are often made based on intuition or familial ties, rather than informed, strategic thinking. Moreover, private schools without professional managers are less likely to embrace modern educational technologies and methodologies, leaving them at a competitive disadvantage in an increasingly digitalized education environment.

In contrast, schools with professional management are better equipped to handle the complexities of curriculum development, financial planning, and teacher recruitment. Professional managers ensure that school operations align with best practices in educational administration, enhancing efficiency and fostering a culture of excellence. To improve the sustainability of private institutions, it is crucial for school owners to invest in hiring trained educational administrators who can implement effective management systems, ensure operational efficiency, and contribute to the long-term success of the school (Onyema & Eze, 2020).

2. Succession Planning and Vision Continuity

Succession planning is another major challenge that impacts the sustainability of private schools in Nigeria. In many cases, schools established by visionary founders face a crisis when the founder passes away or is unable to continue leading the institution. The next generation of leadership, often the children of the founder, may not share the same vision, passion, or capacity to manage the institution effectively. This lack of leadership continuity can cause disruptions in the school's operations, leading to a decline in enrollment, staff morale, and overall performance (Ige, 2018).

Without proper succession planning, schools risk losing their identity and strategic direction. The sudden absence of a founder without a trained or capable successor often results in a leadership void that can have long-lasting negative effects on the institution. Succession planning involves not only identifying potential leaders within or outside the family but also ensuring that these individuals are adequately trained in school management and leadership. Effective succession plans help maintain the school's core values, vision, and operational efficiency,

even during transitions in leadership. Institutions that neglect succession planning often face a significant decline in enrollment and performance, ultimately leading to the closure of the school (Okoro, 2019).

Therefore, private school owners must implement clear succession frameworks that address leadership transition in advance. These frameworks should include mentorship programs, leadership development for potential successors, and a robust strategic plan for ensuring the continuity of the school's mission, even in the absence of its founder. Ensuring that the school's vision is passed down to future leaders guarantees that the institution can continue to thrive, even as it evolves over time.

3. Financial Instability

Financial instability is one of the most critical challenges faced by private schools in Nigeria. Unlike public schools, which are funded by the government, private institutions rely on tuition fees, donations, and other forms of revenue to fund their operations. This dependency makes private schools highly vulnerable to financial instability, particularly in periods of economic downturn or unforeseen crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic. In many cases, private schools operate with poor financial management practices, which exacerbates the problem. Schools without sound financial systems often struggle with cash flow management, leading to difficulties in paying staff salaries, maintaining infrastructure, and meeting other operational expenses (Olufemi, 2021).

The economic fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic further highlighted the financial vulnerability of private schools in Nigeria. During the pandemic, many schools experienced a significant decline in student enrollment, as parents faced financial hardships and struggled to pay tuition fees. Some schools had to shut down temporarily or permanently due to financial insolvency, while others could not afford to maintain their facilities or continue paying teachers' salaries. Financial instability not only disrupts school operations but also tarnishes the reputation of private institutions, making it harder for them to attract new students or secure funding.

To address financial instability, private schools must adopt sound financial management practices. This includes developing a diversified revenue model, ensuring a consistent flow of income, and establishing financial reserves for emergencies. Schools should also explore partnerships with local governments, businesses, and international organizations to secure alternative funding sources. Effective budgeting, financial monitoring, and long-term planning are essential for ensuring that schools remain financially sustainable, even in times of economic uncertainty.

4. Declining Student Enrollment

Declining student enrollment is another challenge that many private schools face in Nigeria. The competition for students has intensified in recent years, as more private schools are established and as public schools, particularly in urban areas, offer more competitive educational options. While private schools in Nigeria have traditionally attracted students seeking better educational opportunities, factors such as high tuition fees, economic hardship, and the availability of free public education have led to a decline in enrollment in some private institutions (Bello, 2019).

The Covid-19 pandemic further exacerbated the issue of declining student enrollment. Many families faced financial difficulties during the pandemic, leading to a reduction in the number of students attending private schools. In some cases, parents moved their children from private institutions to public schools to reduce the financial burden. This trend has led to decreased revenue for private schools, further deepening financial challenges. Moreover, the closure of schools during the pandemic disrupted the academic calendar and led to a loss of trust in private educational institutions, as many parents struggled to ensure that their children continued their education.

Private schools must take proactive measures to address the issue of declining enrollment. These measures may include adjusting tuition fees to make education more affordable, improving the quality of teaching and learning, and offering additional value-added services such as extra-curricular activities, special programs, and scholarships. Furthermore, private schools should strengthen their marketing strategies, engage with parents and communities, and build a reputation for providing high-quality education.

5. Teacher Retention Issues

Teacher retention remains a significant problem for private schools in Nigeria. Teachers in private schools often face low wages, delayed salary payments, and limited career development opportunities, all of which contribute

to high turnover rates. High teacher turnover disrupts the continuity of instruction and negatively affects student learning outcomes. Furthermore, the lack of job security and professional growth opportunities makes it difficult for schools to retain qualified and experienced teachers (Akinola & Adeyemi, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the issue of teacher retention, as many private schools faced financial difficulties and were unable to pay teachers on time. In response, many teachers left private schools for more stable positions in public schools or other sectors. The loss of experienced teachers undermines the quality of education in private schools and creates an ongoing challenge for school management. Additionally, schools that fail to provide competitive salaries, benefits, and professional development opportunities struggle to attract and retain the best educators.

To address teacher retention issues, private schools must prioritize the welfare of their teaching staff. Offering competitive salaries, providing timely payments, and creating opportunities for career advancement are essential for ensuring that teachers remain motivated and committed to their roles. Schools should also invest in ongoing professional development to ensure that teachers are well-equipped to deliver high-quality education. A positive and supportive work environment, combined with fair compensation, will go a long way in reducing teacher turnover and improving the overall quality of education.

The sustainability of private schools in Nigeria is threatened by a range of challenges, including lack of professional management, inadequate succession planning, financial instability, declining student enrollment, and teacher retention issues. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes professionalizing school management, implementing strategic succession plans, improving financial management, and creating an environment that supports teachers and students alike. By taking proactive measures to address these challenges, private schools can enhance their long-term viability and continue to provide quality education to Nigerian students.

Strategies for Sustainable Management in Private Educational Institutions

To ensure the sustainability and long-term viability of private educational institutions in Nigeria, it is essential to adopt a multi-faceted approach that encompasses effective management practices, forward-thinking strategies, and an investment in human resources. These strategies will help private schools navigate the challenges they face and create a foundation for growth and resilience. Below are recommended strategies for ensuring the continued success and sustainability of private schools:

1. Professionalizing School Management

One of the most important strategies for ensuring sustainability in private schools is the professionalization of school management. Many private schools in Nigeria are run by individuals with little or no formal training in education management. Often, these schools are treated as family-run businesses rather than educational institutions that require strategic leadership. To overcome this challenge, private schools must recruit qualified education professionals who can manage the schools effectively (Moses & Okorie, 2021).

A professional management team will bring expertise in strategic planning, operational efficiency, financial management, and human resource management. This will enable schools to implement clear long-term strategies, optimize resource allocation, and enhance the overall educational experience for students. By ensuring that school management is led by professionals with the appropriate qualifications and experience, private schools can maintain high standards of education and improve institutional effectiveness (Onyema & Eze, 2020). Moreover, professional management provides a platform for better decision-making, which helps schools respond more effectively to changing educational trends and challenges.

In addition to hiring qualified managers, private schools should implement training and development programs for staff, including school leaders and administrators. This will help maintain a culture of excellence and continuous improvement.

2. Establishing Clear Succession Plans

Succession planning is crucial for the continued success and sustainability of private schools, particularly those that were founded by visionary individuals. Many schools face challenges when the founder or key leader passes away or is no longer able to manage the institution. Without a clear succession plan, the leadership void can cause

disruption in the school's operations, leading to a decline in performance and, in extreme cases, the eventual closure of the school (Ige, 2018).

Private schools should prioritize the establishment of clear succession plans, which include identifying and grooming future leaders within the institution or family. These plans should also involve the creation of leadership development programs that prepare potential successors to manage the school effectively. Training successors ensures that they are well-equipped with the necessary skills to continue the school's mission and vision. Furthermore, succession planning helps to preserve the school's culture, values, and educational objectives even during leadership transitions. Schools with a strong succession plan are more likely to thrive, even during periods of leadership change (Okoro, 2019).

3. Financial Planning and Management

Financial stability is essential for the long-term survival of private schools. Many private schools in Nigeria struggle with financial management, which affects their ability to pay teachers on time, maintain facilities, and invest in educational resources. To address this issue, private schools must adopt robust financial planning and management practices (Olufemi, 2021).

Diversifying revenue sources is a key strategy for financial sustainability. Schools should not rely solely on tuition fees; they should explore other potential sources of income such as grants, sponsorships, partnerships, and fundraising initiatives. Additionally, schools can consider offering specialized programs, such as after-school tutoring, summer camps, or online courses, which could generate extra revenue. Implementing a sound financial strategy includes developing a budget, monitoring cash flow regularly, and establishing financial reserves for emergencies. Schools should also invest in technology to enhance operational efficiency and reduce costs.

Investing in technology for distance learning is another important aspect of financial planning, especially considering the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Schools that embraced online education platforms were able to continue providing education to students even during periods of lockdown. Furthermore, the integration of digital tools can help schools generate additional revenue streams, such as online courses or certifications. Technology also helps streamline administrative functions, allowing for more efficient management of student records, finances, and communications.

By integrating technology into their operations, private schools can remain competitive in an increasingly digitalized educational landscape. This will not only attract students but also ensure that the school is future-ready and capable of meeting the demands of a modern education system.

4. Enhancing Marketing and Student Enrollment Strategies

Private schools face stiff competition from both other private institutions and public schools. To remain sustainable, private schools need to adopt proactive marketing and student enrollment strategies. A strong marketing strategy involves clearly communicating the unique value proposition of the school, which includes the quality of education, extracurricular activities, and student outcomes (Bello, 2019).

Private schools should improve their visibility through online and offline marketing campaigns, build relationships with the community, and leverage social media to reach potential students and parents. Schools could also offer scholarships and flexible payment plans to attract students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. A strong emphasis on quality education, student welfare, and individualized attention can help distinguish a private school from its competitors. Schools that are able to attract and retain students will have a more stable financial base, enabling them to invest in continuous improvement and educational innovation (Moses & Okorie, 2021).

In addition, private schools should create referral programs where satisfied parents and alumni recommend the school to others, further increasing student enrollment.

5. Investing in Teacher Development and Retention

Teachers are the backbone of any educational institution, and ensuring their professional growth and satisfaction is crucial for the sustainability of private schools. Teachers in private schools are often underpaid or receive delayed payments, leading to low morale and high turnover rates. To improve teacher retention, private schools must prioritize investing in teacher development and offer competitive salaries (Akinola & Adeyemi, 2020).

Professional development programs, such as workshops, conferences, and specialized training, should be regularly organized to enhance teachers' skills and knowledge. Schools can also provide teachers with career advancement opportunities, recognition programs, and incentives that promote job satisfaction and long-term commitment. Creating a positive working environment where teachers feel valued and supported is essential for maintaining a stable, well-trained workforce. Additionally, schools should offer adequate benefits and ensure timely salary payments to reduce turnover and improve teacher retention (Onyema & Eze, 2020).

6. Embracing Technology and Innovation

The adoption of digital tools and technology is becoming increasingly vital for the sustainability of private schools. Technology can enhance learning outcomes, improve administrative efficiency, and increase the institution's reach. Private schools should embrace the use of digital learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and other educational technologies to create an engaging and flexible learning environment (Olufemi, 2021).

In response to the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, many schools transitioned to online learning to maintain continuity in education. Schools that invested in technology were able to continue providing education to students even during periods of lockdown. Furthermore, the integration of digital tools can help schools generate additional revenue streams, such as online courses or certifications. Technology also helps streamline administrative functions, allowing for more efficient management of student records, finances, and communications.

By integrating technology into their operations, private schools can remain competitive in an increasingly digitalized educational landscape. This will not only attract students but also ensure that the school is future-ready and capable of meeting the demands of a modern education system.

Conclusion

The sustainability of private educational institutions in Nigeria is intricately tied to the effectiveness of management practices, strategic planning, and investment in human resources. By professionalizing management, implementing succession plans, adopting sound financial strategies, and embracing technology, private schools can mitigate many of the challenges they face and create a more sustainable future. These practices will ensure that private schools continue to provide quality education to Nigerian students and remain a crucial part of the nation's educational landscape.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

- 1) Private schools should hire experts in educational management to improve operations.
- 2) Government policies should support the professionalization of school ownership.
- 3) Schools should invest in training and retaining educational leaders.
- 4) Schools should focus on inclusive education and diversify their revenue sources.
- 5) Schools sh
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)
- 9)
- 10)
- 11) ould adopt digital tools to enhance their resilience in crises.

REFERENCES

- Akinola, A.O., & Adeyemi, S.B. (2020). Teacher retention and sustainability of private schools in Nigeria: A comparative study. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Research*, 35(4), 129-145.
- Bello, F.T. (2019). Declining enrollment in private secondary schools in Nigeria: Causes and solutions. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44(2), 102-117.
- Ige, J.O. (2018). The role of succession planning in the sustainability of private educational institutions in Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Management*, 31(3), 65-77.

- Ifedi, P.O. (2022). Financial management in Nigerian private schools: An analysis of revenue sources and expenditure patterns. *African Journal of Educational Management*, 28(2).
- Mogboh, V.E., Nnamdi S.N. Ene, Silba I. Uzochukwu, & Cordyl N. Obi (2022). Management mechanisms and performance of Nigerian universities: Insight from Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu, Nigeria. *International Journal of Special Education*, 37(1).
- Mogboh, V.E., Nnamdi S.N. Ene, Silba I. Uzochukwu, & Cordyl N. Obi (2022). The effect of educational planning on the growth of selected private universities in Eastern Nigeria. *International Journal of Special Education*, 37(1).
- Moses, G.O., & Okorie, C.M. (2021). Professional management and its impact on the sustainability of private schools in Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Administration*, 29(1), 78-91.
- Okoro, C.C. (2019). Succession planning and school sustainability in Nigeria's private sector. *Educational Leadership and Policy Studies*, 12(4), 82-95.
- Onyema, E., & Eze, E. (2020). Leadership and succession planning in Nigerian private schools: A case study. *Journal of Educational Leadership*, 28(3), 45-60.
- Olufemi, A. (2021). Financial management in Nigerian private schools: A study of challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Financial Education*, 20(2), 75-88.
- Owolabi, M.O., & Agboola, A.E. (2020). Succession planning and organizational sustainability in private schools: A case study in Nigeria. *Educational Leadership Journal*, 34(2).