

Investigating State-School Synergy for Managerial Efficiency of Headteachers in Public Primary Schools in Abia State, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study examined the relationship between state-school synergy and managerial efficiency of headteachers in public primary schools in Abia State, Nigeria. The study adopted a mixed method research design. Three research questions were raised and one hypothesis was formulated to guide the study. The population for the study covered all public primary school teachers, headteachers and Education Supervisors in public primary schools in Abia State. A multi stage sampling approach was used to select 499 participants for the quantitative aspect of the study and 18 participants for the qualitative aspect. Two instruments were used for data collection: A self-developed questionnaire titled “State-school Synergy And Managerial efficiency of Headteachers Questionnaire” (SSSAMEHQ) and a key informant interview guide. Research questions were answered with descriptive statistics while the hypothesis was tested with Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Qualitative data were analysed in narrative form and verbatim reports of emerging themes. Findings from the study showed a significant relationship between state-school synergy and managerial efficiency of headteachers. Based on the findings, the study concludes that state-school synergy is a crucial factor for the managerial efficiency of headteachers. The study recommends amongst others that Supervisors should be empowered to actively carry out their responsibilities in schools to ensure that headteachers and teachers do not relent in their efforts.

Keywords: synergy, state-school, administrative, efficiency

1. INTRODUCTION

The sustenance of public education will require a viable state-school synergy that exudes a strong proprietor presence in the schools, to provide good direction and leadership. This is predicated on the fact that education is one of the dominant duties of the government to the populace, and a fundamental element in assessing a democratic society, as well as a service the government is indebted to maintain and safeguard [1]. But the impact of globalization on education as in other spheres of influence suggests an apparent shift in approach to management, to meet the demands of globalization amid scarce resources, particularly for an emerging economy like Nigeria, moreso as the world is heading towards the actualization of society 5.0. Efforts to address this issue have brought state-school synergy to the fore as a core consideration for the effective and efficient administration of the public primary school system. This is for the reason that synergy will create room for accountability between the government and school management; and will further help to ensure that resources are properly allocated to areas of need as well as maximally utilized. The proper allocation and utilization of resources contribute immensely to the achievements of the objectives

of education, thereby, making a good case for state-school synergy.

The collaboration between the government and the public school system at all levels also provides school administrators with the necessary support to effectively carry out their duties, in terms of information; communication; resource allocation; monitoring and supervision; response to needs and increased autonomy. According to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [2], Synergy between the government and public school administrators will also help to avoid duplication of responsibilities and prevent inconsistency of objectives. In the overall scheme of teamwork, the government prepares the plan and roadmap and provides the resources with which the schools are managed, while the school administrators manage the resources and work according to plans to ensure that the goals of education are attained. If the government and school leaders perform their respective designated roles, public schools will achieve higher levels of managerial efficiency.

State-school synergy signifies government commitment with schools which is mostly centred on effective resource allocation, monitoring, and supervision. This synergy becomes essential in the face of an apparent

disconnect between government and public schools in Nigeria. The government's responsibility transcends the allocation of resources to the supervision of how such resources are gainfully utilized [3]. In this respect, the government and school leaders are not only concerned with the level of resources and how they are distributed in schools but also with how these investments translate into improved learning. This dual undertaking creates room for more effective use of resources as policymakers are closely involved with the schools. Furthermore, synergy helps to ensure that standards are maintained and headteachers are well-equipped to effectively monitor the delivery of the curriculum; thereby reducing the possibility of wastages. The synergy between the government and public primary schools could provide headteachers with the needed support to effect discipline in schools, in the context of a dysfunctional public service system, where workers take things for granted. By effecting discipline in schools, the headteacher will be able to promote school norms and values in the system, enforce rules and regulations and maximally utilise resources by ensuring that school time and materials are gainfully exploited. A deliberate synergy between the government and public schools could also resolve certain relational discrepancies that often result in industrial actions. If the government and headteachers, therefore, perform their designated roles, headteachers will be more efficient in the administration of schools. Thus, the collaborations among headteachers, school supervisors (government officials), and state policymakers who decide on the resources that schools work with become a veritable tool for effective and efficient administration.

In the same vein, synergy in public administration is an enabling factor to the effectiveness and efficiency of organizational leaders, as well as the attainment of organizational goals. It appears, however, that this factor is neglected in some organisations, to their detriment. An insight into the state of affairs in the administration of the public primary school system in Abia State appears to be showing some form of deficiency in this aspect. The deterioration in the public primary school system in the state could be attributed to the seeming disconnect between the government, who is the proprietor of the public school system and the headteachers – the administrators. The obvious lack of strong proprietor presence has encouraged a lot of irregularities in the administration of these schools. These irregularities exist in diverse forms such as the lackadaisical attitude of the employees of the public school system towards their duties; deficiency of resources; inappropriate allocation of resources; lack of proper information flows; inadequate information and communication; misplacement of the needs of schools and teachers; improper remuneration; despondency of workers and incessant strike actions among others. All these have culminated in the rot in the system and impacted negatively on the effective and efficient administration of the schools.

The government has made several promises to fix the system, and also claims to have done so much to ensure that the public school system runs smoothly in the state, but no visible change appears to have taken place. It is very clear that the public primary school system in Abia State needs attention, and if such attention is not given, the system will further deteriorate as many parents are withdrawing their pupils to the private schools which appear more organized. This state of affairs is worrisome and forms the premise on which this study examined state-school synergy as predictive of managerial efficiency of headteachers in public primary schools in Abia State, Nigeria.

The education production function [4] provides a theoretical lens on which this study can be viewed. The theory rests on the "input-process-output" model which illustrates a functional relationship between the inputs and the outputs of an education production line. In determining the production of education, the theory recognized the existence of two types of inputs: Inputs that are directly controlled by policy makers (characteristics of schools, human, physical and financial resources, curriculum, among others), and inputs that are not so controlled, (influence of families, friends, relationships, natural endowments, among others). The inputs can also be categorized in terms of resources, as tangible and intangible resources and are both required in the education production line. The effectiveness and efficiency of the education system will involve a synergy between the government, who is the major financier of the public school system and the school management. This will enable the system to coordinate the inputs and the outputs of the education production line, and enable the government to effectively monitor the need for and deployment of resources. This way, Headteachers will be properly monitored and motivated in their role performance, thus enhancing their managerial efficiency. This is one way of avoiding wastages in the school system, and maintaining consistency in the education production line.

Several studies on primary education concentrated on pupils' performance, and those on school administration did not consider the relevance of synergy between the government and school management for effective and efficient administration. This study, therefore, sought to bridge this gap in knowledge by investigating the relationship between state-school synergy and managerial efficiency of headteachers in public primary schools in Abia State. To further elicit information, the study specifically sought to determine the managerial efficiency of headteachers in public primary schools in Abia State; and determine the functionality of state-school synergy in public primary schools in Abia State. The rest of the paper is organized under the following sections: An overview of literature, methodology, result presentation, discussion of findings, conclusion and recommendations.

2. OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

It has been observed from scholarly critiques that the dominant role of coordinating the educational and recreational activities of a school system to ensure efficiency is centred on the Headteacher. Argyriou and Iordanidis [5] maintained that within the context of decentralisation, schools are confronted with the need to perform more efficiently and effectively; and this situation has resulted in more effectiveness by school heads in the daily administration and management of schools. According to Mosiori and Thinguri [6], the Headteacher is expected to maintain a good relationship with education authorities; monitor school information; direct the activities of the school; manage school finance; maintain school facilities; administer support services; manage staff; establish a positive school climate; set expectations and goals for the school; provide instructional leadership and good communication within the organisation and create effective collaborations with stakeholders. This will require the school leader's ability to prioritise tasks, build capacity through training and development and harness available resources to succeed in carrying out these enormous tasks.

In addition to this, Lonyian and Kuranchie [7] reported certain modifications in the role of school leaders in the 21st century. Within the context of effective and efficient achievement of administrative objectives, Lonyian and Kuranchie [7] pointed out that the responsibilities of school heads are channeled towards planning; personnel services of staff and pupils; appraisal and improvement; curriculum and instructional development; business and financial management; community-school relations and general administrative tasks.

Evaluating, on one hand, the role of headteachers in school improvement efforts, Qutoshi, and Khaki [8] stated that headteachers are expected to promote the norms, values, and practices of the community and, are, therefore, moral agents. This means that the Headteacher is a highly committed leader, very patient, caring and a great facilitator; while on the other hand, the Headteacher is seen as an effective leader who efficiently manages the entire affair of the school by fulfilling stakeholders' expectations through collaborations.

Contributing to the study on the efficacy of headteachers, Dejaeghere, Williams, and Kyeyune [9] assessed headteachers on important skill areas that border on administration and management; leadership; instruction and supervision; and community and government relations. Breaking the subsets further, Dejaeghere et al. [9] maintained that the efficacy of headteachers revolve around such skills as communication; problem-solving; conflict management; developing mission and strategic plans; monitoring; knowledge of curriculum changes; providing instructional feedback and support for teachers' professional development; involvement of

parents/guardians and community in school affairs and relations with ministry officials. These skills were considered crucial to the managerial effectiveness and efficiency of the headteacher.

In a study that examined the roles of principals as managerial heads of secondary schools, Ibrahim and Umar [10] maintained that managerial efficiency is the ability of the system to carry out its programmes at the least possible cost. Ibrahim and Umar [10] viewed efficiency from the economic angle, hence the definition which is aimed at ensuring that resources are not wasted in the course of daily administrative activities in the organisation.

Contributing immensely to the managerial efficiency discourse, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) [11] referred to this concept as the administrative criterion that reveals the capacity to produce maximum outcomes with a minimum resource, energy and time. This definition implies that the inherent characteristics of this concept are quite useful as they provide the necessary elements for defining efficiency as a criterion of economic performance in educational administration. The efficiency of educational administration is, therefore, the result of an extrinsic instrumental performance of an economic nature as measured in terms of the management capacity to attain a high degree of productivity.

Chapman [12] studied management and efficiency in education in the developing member countries of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). In the study, Chapman [12] reviewed the impact of decentralisation in the administration of the public school system and asserts that decentralisation has shifted more responsibility to headteachers, yet many of them lack the political will to carry out their functions and are least ready to accept the huge responsibility. Consequently, the efficiency of school administration is negatively affected.

Results from a comparative study of the managerial efficiency of principals in public and private secondary schools in Maroua, Besong [13] indicated a high level of managerial efficiency in public secondary schools in Cameroun. Discussing state-school synergy, Kladifko [14] stated that the principal's position is political in nature; therefore, the principal should be ready to go political, through advocacy and lobbying, to receive attention in matters concerning the school. Kladifko [14] added that principals can lobby directly or through lobbyists who partner with lawmakers to give them the necessary information and support to push through the bills they propose. The principal can also lobby through membership with a professional body of school administrators, like the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) which can grow and become a very influential body by which educational issues can be promoted through the legislative process, for the interest of schools.

In the same vein, Mehrotra [15] opined that the challenge that accompanies a state's provision of basic

services in public institutions is not just a consequence of financial resource limitations and inefficiencies in allocations alone. Rather it is also a function of the bureaucratic and organisational setting of state provision which is carried out in a top-down official method, from the sectors in the ministries down to the local level. This method of public service delivery, however, negates collaborations in the various social sectors which is a great source of managerial efficiency. Mehrotra [15] upheld that the state is not capable of providing these services successfully as long as the system continues to operate top-down, and equally claimed that action between sectors is best activated at the local level with rural community-level planning rather than providing services simply on the grounds of resource allocation decided at an upper bureaucratic level of decision-making. The implication is that collaboration may lead to closer ties between development and new school capacity; while lack of trust; politics; time constraints; lack of communication and lack of commitment could be possible causes of disconnect between policymakers and schools.

Kharisma and Pirmana [16] examined the role of government on the quality and provision of education, using public junior secondary schools in provinces in Indonesia. The study considered the involvement of government from the angle of the provision of relevant resources and monitoring issues. The result showed that government involvement with schools through routine expenditure on resources for schools was significant and had a positive effect on the quality of education at the junior secondary level.

However, Aldaihani [17] examined the synergy between schools and State Education District leaders in the application of quality standards in Kuwaiti public schools, using a qualitative method. The result showed a positive effect and a relationship between school-district synergy and school performance and outcomes.

3. METHOD

The study adopted a mixed method research design using the concurrent triangulation strategy, which involves a simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data; and mixing the method in the discussion section [18]. The population for the study was made up of 9502 public primary school teachers, headteachers, and Education Supervisors in 17 LGEAs in Abia State. Yamane (1967) sample size statistical model for a finite population was used to determine the sample size for the population. Thus, applying the Yamane formula, the sample size for the study population =384, plus an additional 30% (115) to compensate for non-response. In all, 499 teachers from 57 schools formed the sample size for the quantitative survey; and were selected using the multi-stage sampling procedure. The purposive sampling technique was used to select six Education Supervisors and 12 headteachers in Aba South, Isuikwuato and Umuahia North LGEAs for key informant interviews. Two types of instruments were used for data collection for the study. They

are: A researcher constructed questionnaire tagged, “State-School Synergy And Managerial Efficiency of Headteachers’ Questionnaire (SSSAMEHQ)” for teachers and Key Informant Interview Guide (KIIG) for Headteachers and Education Supervisors. The results were presented using descriptive statistics while the hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance. Qualitative data were analysed in narrative form and verbatim reports of emerging themes.

4. RESULTS

Research Question One: How efficient are headteachers in the administration of public primary schools in Abia State?

Table 1: Frequencies, Percentages, Mean and Standard Deviations of the Responses on Managerial efficiency of Headteachers (N=479)

S/N	The Head Teacher:	Positive response	Negative response	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Assigns teachers to handle special tasks.	168[35.1]	311[64.9]	2.19	0.955
2	Provides a fair evaluation of teachers’ activities.	102 [21.3]	377[78.7]	1.69	0.800
3	Improvises resources whenever there is need.	206[43.0]	273 (57.0)	2.48	0.585
4	Uses staff skills or knowledge for the benefit of the school.	85 [17.7]	394 [82.3]	1.98	0.640
5	Plans school programmes with teachers before resumption.	82 [17.3]	397 [82.9]	1.69	0.950
6	Recommends teachers for training in areas of need.	53[11.1]	426 [88.9]	1.89	0.566
7	Ensures that teaching materials are available/ properly used.	76[15.9]	403[84.1]	1.55	0.752
8	Supervises classroom teaching to ensure that teachers do their jobs well.	109 [22.8]	370[77.2]	1.65	0.828
9	Enforces discipline in school.	34 [7.1]	445 [92.9]	1.59	0.619
10	Effectively controls staff absenteeism.	60 [12.5]	419 [87.5]	1.42	0.703
11	Ensures that community resources are used for the benefit of the school.	0 [0.0]	479 [100]	1.25	0.436
12	Maintains a close link with community, voluntary organisations.	0 [0.0]	479 [100]	1.39	0.489
13	Rents school facilities to	108 [22.5]	371 [77.5]	2.08	0.607

14	generate money for improvement. Involves stakeholders in decision making.	23[4.8]	456[95.2]	1.48	0.589	8	Education Ministry. Government responds quickly to school demands.					
15	Protects all school facilities from damages.	87 [18.2]	392[81.8]	2.05	0.562	9	Government posts teachers only to areas of need.	148 [31.0]	329[69.0]	2.11	0.802	
16	Uses imprest well.	77[16.1]	402[83.9]	1.74	0.719	10	Government ensures that school facilities are sufficient.	206 [43.5]	268 [56.5]	2.32	1.014	
Average				1.76	0.675	Average		2.37	0.948			

Key: positive response= (Always + Often), Negative response=(Sometimes + Never)

Data presented in Table 1 showed that all the mean scores ranged from 1.25 to 2.48. The average mean of 1.76 with a standard deviation of 0.675 was recorded, indicating that headteachers are not really efficient in the administration of public primary schools in Abia State.

Research Question Two: How functional is state-school synergy in public primary schools in Abia State?

Table 2: Frequencies, Percentages, Mean and Standard Deviations of the Responses on State-School Synergy (N=479)

S/N	Statements	Positive responses	Negative responses	Mean	Std Dev
1	Quick identification of school needs by Government officials.	221[46.7]	252[53.3]	2.38	0.997
2	Headteacher reports school issues to Education Ministry on time.	237[49.4]	242[50.6]	2.42	1.050
3	Government does not dialogue with schools.	211[44.0]	268[56.0]	2.33	0.952
4	Government does not monitor the use of resources.	231[48.4]	247[51.6]	2.45	0.954
5	Government provides trainings for school staff.	307 [54.0]	172 [36.0]	2.81	0.908
6	Regular inspection by School Supervisors.	170[36.6]	295 [63.4]	2.23	0.883
7	Headteacher promptly passes information from	225 [47.2]	252 [52.8]	2.42	0.972

Key: positive response= (Strongly Agree +Agree), Negative response=(Disagree +Strongly Disagree)

Data presented in Table 2 showed that all the mean scores ranged from 2.11 to 2.81. The average mean of 2.37 with a standard deviation of 0.948 was recorded, indicating that state-school synergy is not very functional in public primary schools in Abia State.

Hypothesis One

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between State-school synergy and managerial efficiency of headteachers in public primary schools in Abia State.

Table 3
State-School Synergy and Managerial efficiency of Headteachers

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	R	P-value	Remark	Decision
State-School Synergy	47	23.52	3.048	.465*	.000	Sig	H ₀ Rejected
Managerial efficiency	9	28.93	3.343				

* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows the relationship between State-school synergy and managerial efficiency of public primary schools in Abia State. The tested hypothesis shows that there is a significant relationship between state-school synergy and managerial efficiency of headteachers in public primary schools in Abia State. (r = 0.465*, P =.000, < 0.05). Thus, the null hypothesis that stated that there is no significant relationship between state-school synergy and managerial efficiency in public primary schools was rejected.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings from research questions one and two showed that Headteachers were not efficient in the administration of public primary schools in Abia State, and no functional synergy exists between the government and public primary school headteachers. This could be a result of the seeming apathy of both government and headteachers towards

the administration of public primary schools. Moreover, the non-commitment of most headteachers could be the lack of motivation and irregular payment of public primary school staff salaries. Such a situation can affect both teacher and headteacher commitment and attitude to work. This finding is contrary to the findings of Besong [13], whose study showed a high level of managerial efficiency of Principals in public secondary schools in Cameroun. The finding, however, corroborates the position of Chapman [12] who maintains that most headteachers lack the political will and relevant preparation to achieve efficiency in the administration of public primary schools.

Reports obtained from the qualitative data (Key Informant Interview) for headteachers were also consistent with the findings. When asked how headteachers can maximise resources, in terms of human, physical and financial resources, they all gave similar responses which were all blamed on the government. One of them responded thus: When you talk of teachers, we try our best to monitor them. But the way things are now, it is not easy. The government is not paying our salaries regularly, it has become a problem. Some teachers will say they don't have money to come to school. What will you do? Even we the headteachers need encouragement. The willingness to do extra things for school is dying out bit by bit. The government does not give us imprest, so what do we do? How do we manage things in the school without money? It is not easy at all.

On how schools get their resources and the rate at which they come, the headteachers that were interviewed were unanimous in saying that they make requisitions for such, but that such requests are always delayed, except you have to lobby through people you know or look for solutions outside since the government allows that. However, most of them complained that they could not lobby. When asked if the government allows headteachers a level of autonomy to carry out some projects or get assistance from outside the government, there was no discordant view in the headteachers' response thus: The government allows us to seek support from outside, only that we should communicate such support to the board when we get them, for proper recognition and appreciation of such individuals and corporate bodies.

This position was also corroborated by the Supervisors from the Education board in a key informant interview. One of them said: The government allows Headteachers a level of autonomy in Abia State. Headteachers can seek assistance and help from individuals and organisations. The only thing that the government demands from them is that when such help is received, they must report to the State so that the individual or organisation will be officially and properly recognised and appreciated by the State.

The result from the test of the hypothesis indicated a positive relationship between state-school synergy and managerial efficiency of headteachers in public primary schools in Abia State. This shows that the poor quality relationship between the government and public school staff, which had often resulted in industrial actions, could account partly for the poor

condition of most public primary schools across the State. The finding corroborates the work of Aldaihani [17] which reported a significant relationship between District leaders-schools synergy and enforcement of standards across schools in the United States. This is to say that the application of quality standards as components of managerial efficiency depends more on the level of synergy between government agencies and school management.

Reports obtained from the qualitative data (Key Informant Interview) for Supervisors/Evaluators and headteachers were also consistent with the findings. On the role of the government in the State-School synergy and how the government is performing such roles, a Supervisor responded thus: The role of the government in public schools is mostly to provide the resources that the schools need; and also to monitor such resources to ensure that they are properly maintained and used. Unfortunately, things are not working the way they should. There is no money for a lot of things in the State; so many things are affected including schools.

One of the participants, another Supervisor expressed her view on government involvement in school supervision, this way: The major problem we have in the State is lack of funds and it affects school supervision. We cannot use our money to do the work, and even if we should, the money is not there because the government is not paying our salaries regularly. Out of the three inspections we are supposed to carry out in schools, we manage to go to the ones close to us maybe once or twice but the schools that are far and those in rural areas suffer most because we do not visit them, for lack of necessary materials to work with, especially during the rainy season because of very bad roads.

It is very disheartening to see the caliber of some headteachers that oversee the public primary school system in Abia State. Most of them actually lack the political will and drive to manage these public schools. This situation aligns with the position of Chapman [12] who holds that the responsibilities that are associated with decentralisation fall directly on the headteacher who unfortunately appear the least ready to accept such responsibilities. To further buttress the point, most headteachers in Nigeria generally lack the requisite training in administration as most of them rose in rank as teachers to the position of headteachers. Irrespective of government's lack of commitment to the primary school system, as was the major complaint from the teachers and headteachers, the headteachers themselves appear not to be making things easy for the system, as they consistently sit around and wait endlessly for the government despite the acclaimed autonomy, to take certain actions to the advantage of schools.

The ability of the headteacher to ensure that adequate school supplies are sent to the school in good time enables teachers and pupils to engage in meaningful teaching and learning as well as helping the headteacher carry out administrative tasks without a waste of time and other resources. In the same vein, when headteachers form the habit of engaging in collaborative decision making, by involving teachers and other

stakeholders like parents and the community, the headteacher will have access to ideas and information that will facilitate administration. To efficiently manage the public primary school system, the headteacher should be creative enough to improvise resources whenever there is a need and also put staff and pupils' skills to productive use. By so doing, the headteacher effectively maximises resources and reduces operational costs.

The efficient administration of schools also requires that headteachers effectively supervise classroom teaching and decipher areas of professional development needs of teachers and recommend such training in order to enhance teacher productivity, or organise in-house training sessions to help out. This is necessary because keeping abreast of educational practices around the globe promotes school performance and enhances the productivity of the system.

Moreover, proactiveness, prompt response to issues and maintenance of school facilities will help to avoid wastages in different forms. When the headteacher is proactive, certain administrative deficiencies can be avoided and this can result in improved performance for schools. Furthermore, the ability of the headteacher to effectively involve parents and the community in key areas in the administration of schools, and also connect the school with other schools, provides support to public primary schools and helps the school to have access to more resources. This way, schools learn to be committed to their responsibilities knowing that they are also accountable to parents and the community. This situation helps the headteacher to enforce discipline among staff and pupils, resulting in decreased teacher and pupil absenteeism and misbehaviour. The inability of headteachers in Abia State to religiously work within the boundaries of these indicators of administrative efficiency has resulted in inefficiencies in the administration of public primary schools in Abia State.

6. CONCLUSION

Given the findings of this study, it is pertinent to conclude that synergy between the government and headteachers in public primary schools will empower the school system to effectively and efficiently achieve the objectives of the school. Given the findings of this study and the conclusions drawn therefrom, the study makes the following recommendations: (1) Headteachers and government officials should create avenues of meaningful interaction, as necessary steps towards enhancing the managerial efficiency of headteachers. (2) Supervisors should be empowered to actively carry out their responsibilities in schools to ensure that headteachers and teachers do not relent in their efforts. (3) State-school synergy should be strengthened in public primary schools in Abia State, to enhance the managerial efficiency of headteachers. Specifically, Government should maintain a close relationship with public primary schools to

effectively monitor the use of resources and also ensure that resources are adequately deployed.

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