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Assessment of Conflicts Management Strategies by Secondary School Principals

Moses Adeleke Adeoye*

Educational Management and Counselling, Faculty of Education, Al-Hikmah University Ilorin, Nigeria

*Correspondence: E-mail: princeadelekm@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Conflict management is the ability of the school head to deal with everyday situations in removing the cognitive barriers to agreement and flexibility. The principal has a compulsory task of utilizing and directing the behaviour of human resources of his school towards the accomplishment of the school goals. The study evaluates conflict management by secondary school principals. The study used a descriptive survey design with a population of 49 principals. Two research questions and one hypothesis were used to collect data. The review of the literature revealed that conflict is inevitable and inherent in every human organization. The research instrument used was titled 'Assessment of Conflicts Management by Secondary Principals Questionnaire' (ACMSPQ) with a 4-point scale. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, Section A entails the personal data of the respondents while Section B contains 17 items on assessment of conflicts management relating to staffs-related & students' related conflicts in secondary schools. The data were analyzed using a weighted mean for the two research questions at a benchmark level of 2.50 and a one-way analysis of variance for the hypotheses at levels of 0.5 level of probability. Findings from the data revealed that the assessment of conflict management by principals was effectively carried out through various strategies. It was concluded that principals should ensure the proper clarification of teachers' roles or schedules of duties and the allocation of school resources to the staff.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Management of conflicts entails the process of employing certain strategies and is introduced in secondary schools to control conflicts (Fisher, 2000). Okotoni and Okotoni (2003) perceived conflict as human and social problems which involve mutual hostility, differences, disagreement, and opposition resulting in man's inhumanity to man, use of violence, turning points or crises which may escalate to the level of psychological warfare or physical or open war. Conflict is usually the result of a long process of agitations, disharmony, insensitivity to demands and neglects of warning signals that are manifest or latent. Conflict involves apparent incongruence between the needs of staff working in a school and the needs and demands of the school system itself. All organizations such as schools and colleges have conflict potentials since they are collections of people with diverse personalities. The conflict that occurs in the secondary school system could be attributed to the dearth of effective communication networks, management style, disagreement over goals and competition over scarce resources, an uncondusive working environment and prejudice. According to Okotoni and Okotoni (2003), conflicts that occur in a secondary school between the host community and the school is due to the principal's bad leadership style, gross misconduct of the staff or the students, pursuit of goal contrary to the cherished values of the community, non-involvement of the community in decision-making that affects them.

The adoption of an autocratic management style by the principal to the detriment of the democratic management style expected by the teachers breeds conflict between the two. Teachers sometimes clash with one another because of poor definitions of duty roles, lack of dedication to their duties and non-involvement in the decision-making process. Onwurah (2004) noted that the causes of conflicts in our secondary schools today include prejudice based on personal background among staff, uncondusive teaching and learning environment, personality differences, communication gap, poor definition of roles of staff, divergence in goals, scarce resource, staff's consistent absence from school in pursuit of personal interest and dearth of effective participation in the decision-making process. Ewoh (2014) affirmed that conflict within a school system leads to disruptions, and distortions and impedes the attainment of educational objectives. Management coordinates all the resources of an organization through the process of planning, organizing, directing and controlling to attain organizational objectives (Deety & Stevenson, 2006). The absence of planning, organizing, directing and controlling organizational activities breeds conflicts in an organization like a school. Mgbodile (2004) opined that any conflict arising in the school system is usually a reflection of the school head's poor coordinating ability. Therefore, management is inevitable in the effort to control organizational conflicts.

Conflict management is the ability of the school head to deal with everyday situations in removing the cognitive barriers to agreement and flexibility on the part of the principals (Msila, 2012). Management of conflicts in secondary schools has attracted the attention of researchers and stakeholders. The principal has a compulsory task of utilizing and directing the behaviour of human resources of his school towards the accomplishment of the school goals. Osgood (1962) propounded the theory known as Grit Theory. He explained that in any organization, the hierarchies of offices need to be equitably shared among different interest groups to prevent the monopoly of top offices by a single interest group. In secondary schools, most principals use this principle gotten from Grit theory to settle conflicts by different interest groups among teachers and non-tutorial staff. They evenly distribute leadership positions in the school among the groups to decongest tension in the schools over sharing of positions. Assessment of the management of conflicts by secondary school principals will

verify the strength or the weakness of the strategies of instruments used from the findings to handle the particular problem (Hostetler, 2005). Through such assessment, the non-performing principals will either be recommended for further training or be re-assigned to perform other special duties as may be directed.

The present study will assess the various strategies by principals in managing staff-related conflicts in the Ughelli metropolis. The findings of the study will assist teachers in secondary schools to realize that they have enormous roles to play in the management of conflicts. It will prepare them to resolve conflicts in their respective schools.

The main purpose of the study is to assess the various strategies employed by principals in managing staff-related conflicts in the Ughelli metropolis. The study seeks to:

- (i) Identify strategies principals adopt in managing staff-related conflicts in the Ughelli metropolis.
- (ii) Normalize strategies principals adopt in managing students' related conflicts in the Ughelli metropolis.

Research questions are:

- (i) What strategies do principals adopt in managing staff-related conflicts?
- (ii) What strategies do principals adopt in managing students' related conflicts?

The hypothesis in this study is Ho1: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of experienced and less experienced principals about how they manage staff-related conflict.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Alabi (2002) identified two major sources of conflicts in educational institutions: Behavioural and Structural based conflicts. Behaviour-based conflict is attributed to the personal behaviour of the individuals as they relate to themselves which include differences in the personality trait, differences in background, differences in values, differences in perceptions, poor communication skills, style of management, incompetence, poor attitude to work and anti-authority prejudice. Structural Based Conflict is the disagreement which stems from the way an organization (educational institution) is arranged such as the size, nature of the environment, and Organizational structure which form the basic framework within the executive decision-making behaviour. Differences in Personal Trait/Behaviour do create conflict in terms of their authoritarianism, mannerism aggressiveness, hostility, self-esteem, reaction to provocation and predisposition to distrust and suspicion. Willower (1980) posited that people who are dictatorial or have low self-esteem are easily prone to distort reality. Those that are aggressive, hostile and overreact to provocation find themselves in conflict more frequently with others than those without these traits. Differences in perception lead to disagreement, hinder inter-personal or inter-group rapport and make cooperative and joint decision-making between individuals and groups very difficult (Willower, 1980).

Conflict is intensified when lines of communication are not clear as it is common when diplomatic language is used to disseminate information. Poor communication disrupts the coordination and loyalty of individuals in a system, especially in secondary schools. Fisher (2000) posited that a lack of skill in communicating what an individual means in a clear fashion often confuses, hurts, and breeds the conflict process. He concluded that an authoritarian principal may encourage limited communication which may lead to misunderstanding and eventually result in conflict. Anti-Authority is another worker's behaviour that breeds conflict. Willower (1980) stated that any impersonal bureaucratic behaviour is perceived negatively and highly begrudged. Defiance of authority could be shown in blunt refusal to take

instructions in form of an uncooperative attitude. Sometimes, it can come from teachers that have served long in a particular school with a considerable wealth of experience. Okolo (2002) conducted a study on effective conflict resolution strategies as perceived by parents, teachers and members of the board of governors in Enugu state. The study revealed that the involvement of law enforcement agencies cannot be a strategy for the effective resolution of conflict in school organizations.

Dimelu *et al.* (2007) conducted a study on principals' conflict management strategies in Kogi state. The focus was to identify the causes of conflicts, establish the type of conflict that is common in secondary schools and conflicts management strategies that are commonly adopted by principals. The findings showed that scarce resources, communication gaps, the overlap of teachers' roles, divergence in goals and work interdependence are all causes of conflicts. Okotoni and Okotoni (2003) conducted a study on principals' conflict management strategies in secondary schools in Rivers state. The focus was to identify the causes of conflicts, establish the types of conflict that are common in secondary schools and conflict management strategies that are commonly adopted by principals. The findings showed that scarce resources, communication gaps, the overlap of teachers' roles, divergence in goals and work interdependence are causes of conflicts. Effective communication, availability of resources and involving teachers and students in school administration are strategies for preventing conflicts while the dialogue, arbitration and silence in setting a goal are conflict management strategies.

3. METHODS

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The researcher considered descriptive survey design because it uses a representative sample of the entire population and it enables the entire population to be described in its natural setting. The study examined conflict management by secondary principals in the Ughelli metropolis. The population of this study consisted of only forty-nine (49) principals in the Ughelli metropolis. The research instrument used was titled 'Assessment of Conflicts Management by Secondary Principals Questionnaire' (ACMSPQ). The questionnaire was divided into two sections, Section A entails the personal data of the respondents while Section B contains 17 items on assessment of conflicts management relating to staffs-related & students' related conflicts in secondary schools. The questionnaire has a 4-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The instrument was validated by three (3) experts from Educational Administration & Planning. The reliability of the instrument was analyzed using the Cronbach Alpha reliability technique with an overall estimate of 0.86. The reliability coefficients of 0.88, 0.71, 0.71 and 0.88 were obtained respectively. This reliability coefficient shows that the instrument is reliable. Weighted mean (\bar{X}) was used in answering the research questions with an acceptable level of 2.50 while a One-way analysis of variance was used to analyze the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of data in **Tables 1, 2, 3,** and **4** show that items 1 to 11 have mean values greater than the benchmark mean of 2.50. Going by the decision rule, it means that items 1 to 11 are the strategies adopted by principals in managing staffs-related conflicts.

The analysis of data in **Table 5** shows that the probability value for the calculated value of F (1.260) for the influence of work experience is 0.267. Since this value is greater than the

0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is accepted. Thus, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of experienced and less experienced principals on how they manage students' related conflicts.

Table 1. Summary data from a field survey in Sherpur Sadar Upazilla, Sherpur.

Strategies adopted by principals in managing staffs-related conflicts	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Encouraging the free flow of communication.	3.9500	0.22361	20
Involving teachers in the decision-making process.	3.7000	0.47016	20
Attending to teachers' welfare like provision of accommodation and other financial assistance.	3.9000	0.30779	20
Adhering to the set-up conflict resolution committee's advice.	3.6000	0.68056	20
Transferring of erring teachers.	3.6000	0.75394	20
Clarifying teachers' duties.	3.9000	0.30779	20
Encouraging good interpersonal relationships.	3.9500	0.22361	20
Using diplomacy in the dissemination of information.	3.9500	0.22361	20
Encouraging teachers to be punctual and regular in duties.	3.9000	0.30779	20
Encouraging staff development programs such as in-service training, workshops and conferences.	3.5000	0.68825	20
Involving school Board of Governors in handling teachers-related problems.	3.7000	0.47016	20

Table 2. Statistical analysis from table 1.

Statistics	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum
Item Means	3.786	3.500	3.950	0.450	1.129
Item Variances	0.217	0.050	0.568	0.518	11.368
Inter-Item Covariances	0.039	-0.053	0.463	0.516	-8.800
Inter-Item Correlations	0.212	-0.248	1.000	1.248	-4.025

Table 3. What are the strategies adopted by principals in managing students related conflicts?

Strategies adopted by principals in managing student-related conflicts	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Providing adequate teaching and learning facilities in the school.	3.8000	0.61559	20
Providing a conducive environment for teaching and learning through the provision of seats and enough accommodation.	3.8000	0.61559	20
Expelling erring students.	3.1000	1.11921	20
Inviting parents of the offenders in open discussion.	3.9500	0.22361	20
Using guidance counsellors in settling students-related conflicts.	3.9500	0.22361	20
Using security agents to guard against conflicts.	3.8000	0.61559	20

Table 4. Statistical analysis from table 3.

Statistic	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum/Minimum
Item Means	3.733	3.100	3.950	0.850	1.274
Item Variances	0.415	0.050	1.253	1.203	25.053
Inter-Item Covariances	0.118	-0.011	0.379	0.389	-36.000
Inter-Item Correlations	0.357	-0.076	1.000	1.076	-13.077

Table 5. Hypothesis one: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of experienced and less experienced principals about how they manage staff-student-related conflicts.

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	0.113	1	0.113	1.260	0.267
Within groups	4.221	47	0.090		
Total	4.334	48			

The finding also revealed that the provision of adequate teaching and learning facilities helps in managing students' related conflicts. With those facilities, students will be psychologically and socially equipped to tackle their academic problems. The present finding contributes greatly to the efficient and effective administration of the school, as this will improve better communication system between the students, principals and teachers. The most important strategy revealed by the correspondents was the ability of principals to use a democratic style of leadership in managing staff-related conflicts.

The use of this strategy enables the principals to involve all stakeholders in contributing to the decisions affecting their general welfare as this will promote individual interest and commitment to the attainment of the school's objectives. Adegbemile (2011) supported the use of staff meetings in the school to resolve issues affecting teachers' welfare. The finding also revealed that encouraging the free flow of information by principals is another strategy for managing teacher-related conflicts. Getz *et al.* (2006) said that effective communication is a weapon with which a given organization does operate. Therefore, the use of this strategy by principals in schools will help to a great extent in the management of teachers' related conflict.

There should be prompt dissemination of information about innovations in schools. Principals should not seize information about staff's welfare in the school to attain the school's objectives. The finding further revealed that setting up a conflict resolution committee was a strategy that principals adopted in managing teachers' related conflicts. The resolution from the committee set up by principals was used in resolving conflicts involving both parties and their relationship will be further strengthened. Adeyemi (2009), and said that principals of schools should use this strategy to manage conflicts in schools as the simplest means of dispensing justice as this will enable each party to be satisfied with the resolutions. Teachers' related conflict revealed from the findings was also managed by principals using clarification of teachers' duties.

The finding is supported by Awe (2020) that clarifying teacher duties is not only enough as a means of managing conflicts and that principals should also identify and clarify interdependencies that have caused the conflicts. The finding showed that the use of diplomacy in the dissemination of information was also a strategy adopted by principals in managing teachers' related conflicts. The principals should always be polite in giving out instructions to teachers. Peurach (2019) that teachers should always be carried along in decisions affecting the attainment of school-stated objectives.

5. CONCLUSION

The most effective methods for resolving disputes involving staff members are democratic leadership, free flow of communication among principals, participation of teachers in decision-making, attention to their welfare, adherence to the recommendations of the established conflict resolution committee, removal of ineffective teachers, clarification of teacher responsibilities, promotion of positive interpersonal relationships and encore in terms of how they handle staff and student-related conflicts, school-community conflicts, and other conflicts, there was no discernible difference in the mean ratings of experienced and less experienced principals. The mean ratings of male and female principals on how they handle disputes involving students also showed a significant difference. To encourage teacher well-being, principals will leverage the results of these tactics' applications. The results indicated that coordinated efforts were necessary to ensure the achievement of school goals. When resolving disputes involving teachers, the administration of the school ought to lead democratically. Teachers should be assigned tasks that are clearly defined by their principals to guarantee that the resources designated for these tasks are used quickly and correctly.

6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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