



Principals' Conflict Resolution Strategies on Effective Management of Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on principals' conflict resolution strategies on effective management of secondary schools as perceived in Port Harcourt Metropolis. Two objectives, research questions and hypotheses guided the study. The population consisted of 866 principals and teachers. The sample size consisted of 471 respondents using simple random sampling technique. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire developed by the researchers and was validated by two experts in Educational management and one Business Education expert. Cronbach Alpha was used to test the reliability of the instrument and a co-efficient of 0.78 was obtained. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to analyze the research questions, while z-test was used to test the hypotheses. Findings from the study showed Principals' conflict resolution strategies on effective management of secondary schools include avoidance and accommodation approaches. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations made amongst others include that school managers and administrators should identify the actual causes and nature of the conflict among the entire staff of the school before applying the available conflict techniques, strategies and methods at their disposals. Also, that management should always apply the best practice of win-win strategy so that every individual in the conflict arena will not adjudge favouritism

Keywords: Conflict, Conflict Resolution Strategies, and School Management.

INTRODUCTION

Organization is a conglomerate of people with different values, cultural backgrounds, and norms that work together as a team in order to achieve common goals. These people are bound by certain rules and regulations in order to maintain peace, to achieve a particular set of goals and objectives and a school is one of such organization. The school organization achieves its goals through principals and teachers' effectiveness in facilitating teaching and learning processes. Principals and teachers' job effectiveness as used here refers to the ability of principals and teachers to organize their job processes and professionalism in a manner that enables them to perform more work and adequately produce expected results in terms of classroom teaching, maintenance of classroom discipline and supervision of students' academic activities (Eric, 2015). In the midst of these activities, conflict which is a phenomenon that is unquestionably identified with human relationship in any organization may set in.

Based on the foregoing, Kulo and Ambrose (2014) envisaged that conflict is any divergence of interests, objectives or priorities between individuals, groups or organizations. Kulo and Ambrose further stressed

that conflict involves opposite needs in action. This may be the apparent needs of teachers working in a school and the needs of the school system. In the school organization, conflict emanates from the interactions between members (students, staff, management and the community) and across the organization as members strive to achieve the goals and objectives of education resulting in: student/student conflict, student/staff conflict, staff/staff conflict, principal/staff conflict and school/community conflict. Conflicts are caused by a number of aspects that create tensions between people. Corvette (2007) contends that conflict exists wherever and whenever there is incompatibility of cognitions or emotions within individuals or between individuals. Moreover, conflict arises in personal relationship in organizations, between groups and between nations. Similarly, Asiegbu and Egboka (2013) inferred that conflict is a mutual hostility in inter-human relationships. Mutual hostility occurs in form of insults, name-calling, stepping into another's shoes, sarcasm, false accusations, withdrawal of love and support, unpaid salaries, sudden transfer, termination, demotion, boycott of classes, open violence, and suspicion. These are apparently common in the secondary schools. Hence, it affects the accomplishment of the school's goals due to their resultant stress, hostilities, and other undesirable factors when poorly managed. Sompaa (2015) stressed that some conflicts in secondary schools occur due to lack of proper diagnosis leading to crisis and that they are not understood or not managed properly. Hence, it needs to be properly managed in order to create a healthy organizational climate that is so important for effective learning and performance of responsibilities.

Conflict resolution, therefore, is the process or method of facilitating interpersonal communication to get parties to a conflict to reduce the differences in their ideals and views through arbitration, bargaining and negotiation (Bannon & Paul, 2003). Resolution more or less involves the reduction, elimination, or termination of all forms and types of conflicts. Hence, conflict resolution tends to use terms like negotiation, bargaining, mediation or arbitration. In other words, it is a method incorporated to facilitate a positive or at least an agreeable outcome. Principals and teachers do involve in conflict resolution and management in the school system on issues bordering on students' discipline and control. The extent, to which a conflict is resolved, depends upon the extent to which the parties to the conflict perceive their negotiated gains and losses during bargaining which is expected to be relatively equitable (Odigwe, 2014). Hence, when conflict occurs in the school, it calls for conflict resolution and this could be done tactfully by means of conciliation, competition, yielding, co-operation, avoidance and forcing strategies.

Avoidance as a conflict resolution strategy is one in which the administrator withdraws or waits and see with the hope that it is not disruptive or that the situation will eventually resolve itself in time. It is characterized by inaction and passivity as well allows problems to foster out of control (Ike, 2012). The parties' interests are usually not met, nor is the interpersonal relationship maintained in this approach. Ogonda (2011) opined that this approach might take the form of diplomatically side-tracking an issue, postponing an issue, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation. This is a leave-lose/win approach in which one party's stance toward conflict management is to leave-lose, allowing the other parties to win. Ogonda further buttressed that avoiding or withdrawing from a conflict requires no courage or consideration for the other party. By avoiding the conflict, you essentially pretend that it never happened or does not exist. This avoidance style can be a very useful, constructive resolution tool in the effective management of school between the principal and teacher when words may become so heated that a period of avoiding one another could lead to reducing the intensity of the conflict; and by avoidance, the individuals involved could think more clearly and possibly come together in a more-friendlier way after their feelings have settled down. According to Lorna (2014), adopting avoidance as a method of conflict resolution can be an active method of team building and will provide a common identity and a sense of unity amongst staff if handled properly by administrators of schools.

Accommodation as a conflict resolution strategy is a yield-lose/win strategy wherein one party yields to the other party (or parties) to protect and preserve the relationships involved. The accommodating approach to conflict involves maintaining the interpersonal relationships at all costs, with little or no concern for the interests of the parties involved. Giving in, appeasing, and avoiding the conflict are viewed as ways of protecting the relationships. It is that management style in which administrators ignore

self-interest by satisfying others' concerns. In obliging style, the administrators try to absorb conflict by minimizing differences with other parties. The administrator is hesitant in expressing his ideas, beliefs and feelings. It highlights common interests while bringing to the fore open recognition of actual or perceived conflicts to their lowest points. This is, however, a temporary style of conflict management where a principal makes effort to buy time as he/she seek cooperation in the school (Crossfield & Bourne, 2018). According to Kembukem (2014), accommodation strategy can be used when an individual is willing to make a concession with the hope of getting something in return. This style is associated with an endeavour to play down the differences and emphasizing harmony to satisfy the concern of the other party. There is an element of self-sacrifice in this style. The accommodation or obliging style is used when relations are more important than issues and encouragement is needed to staff. The strategies which are used in obliging styles are to make excuses, to be silent, soft language, reluctant in voice and follow the ideas of opponent party. Therefore, since schools operate in a competitive environment characterized with conflicting interests among principals and teachers, and among teachers and students, having a good understanding of when to adopt accommodation strategy in conflict situation in the school environment to mitigate imminent disruption can promote effective management of schools. Gankar (2012) envisaged that this strategy is important in the effective management of organizations especially in a school because it leads to the identification of the source of the conflict which paves way for the finding of a solution acceptable by the conflicting parties (administrators and teachers, teachers and students, etc).

The researchers have observed that studies focusing on conflicts show that working with people in an organization involves dealing with many different kinds of problems. Like organizations, the consequences of conflict between teachers and school leaders have been regrettable. However, the role of school leaders in conflict management and resolution is therefore central to effective and efficient organization of school management (Ramani & Zhimin, 2010). Since conflict is natural in any organization, the management must rationally deal with it so as to create ways which maximize its benefits and minimize its dysfunctional consequences. To be able to develop a workable approach to conflict management, understanding the root causes of conflicts is therefore critical.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine Principals' conflict resolution strategies on effective management of secondary schools in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine how avoidance as conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of secondary schools in Rivers State.
2. Ascertain how accommodation as conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Questions

In the course of carrying out this research, the following questions were posed for the study:

1. To what extent avoidance as conflict resolution strategy influences effective management of secondary schools in Rivers State?
2. To what extent accommodation as conflict resolution strategy influences effective management of secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean response of principals and teachers on how avoidance as a conflict resolution strategy influences effective management of secondary schools in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean response of principals and teachers on how accommodation as a conflict resolution strategy influences effective management of secondary schools in Rivers State.

METHOD

Correlational research design was adopted for this study and it was carried out in Rivers State. The population of the study consists of 866 respondents which is made up of 51 (principals) and 815 (teachers) from the 29 senior secondary schools in Port-Harcourt and Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas of Rivers State. The sample size consists of 471 respondents (51 principals and 420 teachers) which represents 55% of the total population and the researcher adopted a simple random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a 10-item structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured in a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Disagree (D); and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was validated by two experts; one in Business Education and the other in Educational Management. Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the instrument and a co-efficient of 0.78 was obtained. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed and collected by the researchers. Mean and standard deviation were used for the analysis and z-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: *To what extent does avoidance as conflict resolution strategy influences effective management of secondary schools in Rivers State?*

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Extent Avoidance as Conflict Resolution Strategy Influences Effective Management of Schools.

s/n	Item	Principals (N=51)			Teachers (N=420)						
		\bar{X}	SD	RMKS	\bar{X}	SD	RMKS				
1.	Conflicting staff matters were set-aside due to pressing administrative and academic issues.	3.5	0.7	5	0	Agree	3.2	0.7	6	4	Agree
2.	Students are afraid of pursuing a matter against the school authority but instead seek for leniency.	3.1	0.7	0	6	Agree	3.3	0.7	0	4	Agree
3.	Staff and students are encouraged to ignore the conflicting issues for peace to be in the school.	3.3	0.6	5	3	Agree	3.3	0.7	4	5	Agree
4.	Students do not forgo their conflicts to avoid immediate sanctions by the school authority.	1.4	0.6	9	1	Disagree	1.7	0.6	1	7	Disagree
5.	Employed by principals and teachers when words may become so heated.	3.2	0.7	7	0	Agree	3.1	0.7	9	8	Agree
Grand Mean and SD		2.95	0.68				2.96	0.74			
					Agree				Agree		

Source: Field Survey (2021)

The data presented in table 1 showed the responses of Principals with a mean score of 3.55, 3.10, 3.35, 1.49 and 3.27, while Teachers' responses revealed the mean score of 3.26, 3.30, 3.34, 1.71 and 3.19 respectively. The table also revealed average grand mean of 2.95 and standard deviation of 0.68 for Principals and 2.96 with standard deviation of 0.74 for teachers which indicated that the respondents

accepted to majority of the items as how avoidance as conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of secondary schools.

Research Question 2: *To what extent does accommodation as conflict resolution strategy influences effective management of secondary schools in Rivers State?*

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Extent Accommodation as Conflict Resolution Strategy Influences Effective Management of Schools.

sn	Item	Principals (N=51)			Teachers (N=420)		
		\bar{X}	SD	RMKS	\bar{X}	SD	RMKS
6.	Employed when staff and students are willing to make a concession with the hope of getting something in return.	3.2 4	0.7 4	Agree	3.2 5	0.7 7	Agree
7.	Leads to the identification of the source of the conflict between staff and students.	3.2 9	0.6 4	Agree	3.2 3	0.7 9	Agree
8.	This style is associated with an endeavour to play down the differences and emphasizing harmony to satisfy the concern of the other party.	3.3 3	0.7 7	Agree	3.1 7	0.8 0	Agree
9.	Creates better results and higher commitment between staff and students.	3.3 3	0.6 8	Agree	3.1 5	0.7 6	Agree
10	Administrators ignore self-interest by satisfying others' concerns.	3.3 1	0.6 8	Agree	3.3 1	0.7 4	Agree
Grand Mean and SD		3.30	0.70	Agree	3.22	0.77	Agree

Source: Field Survey (2021)

The data presented in table 2 the Principals responses demonstrated the mean score of 3.24, 3.29, 3.33, 3.33 and 3.31 while Teachers' responses showed a mean score of 3.25, 3.23, 3.17, 3.15 and 3.31. The table indicated an average grand mean of 3.30 and standard deviation of 0.70 for Principals and 3.22 and standard deviation of 0.77 for Teachers' which indicated that the respondents accepted of the items as how accommodation as conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of secondary schools.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean response of principals and teachers on how avoidance as a conflict resolution strategy influences effective management of secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 3: z-test Analysis of the Mean Responses of Principals and Teachers' on how Avoidance as a Conflict Resolution Strategy Influences Effective Management of Secondary Schools.

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	Alpha	DF	Z-cal	Z-crit	Decision
Principals	51	2.95	0.68	0.05	469	0.98	1.96	Not Rejected
Teachers	420	2.96	0.74					

z-cal (z-calculated), z-crit (z-critical).

The result of table 3 indicated that the z-calculated value of 0.98 was less than the z-critical value of 1.96 at 469 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean responses of principals and teachers on how avoidance as a conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of secondary schools was accepted.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean response of principals and teachers on how accommodation as a conflict resolution strategy influences effective management of secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 4: z-test Analysis of the Mean Responses of Principals and Teachers’ on how Accommodation as a Conflict Resolution Strategy Influences Effective Management of Secondary Schools.

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	Alpha	DF	Z-cal	Z-crit	Decision
Principals	51	3.30	0.70	0.05	469	0.19	1.96	Not Rejected
Teachers	420	3.22	0.77					

z-cal (z-calculated), z-crit (z-critical).

The result on table 4 indicated that the z-calculated value (0.19) was less than the z-critical (1.96) at the degree of freedom 469 and 0.05 significant levels. Hence, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean responses of principals and teachers on how accommodation as a conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of secondary schools was accepted.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings from this study revealed that Principals and Teachers’ of secondary schools that agreed that avoidance approach contributes to effective management of schools. Ogonda (2011) reported that avoidance style is a very useful and constructive resolution tool in the effective management of school between the principal and teacher when words may become so heated that a period of avoiding one another could lead to reducing the intensity of the conflict; and by avoidance, the individuals involved could think more clearly and possibly come together in a more-friendly way after their feelings have settled down. In this case, the process of avoidance is conducive to team building. It was a common denominator which served to increase the effectiveness of staff, ease their relationship with management and provide support for individual members in a time of unrest. According to Lorna (2014), adopting avoidance as a method of conflict resolution can be an active method of team building and will provide a common identity and a sense of unity amongst staff if handled properly by administrators of schools. In line with the above assertion, Moriarty (2013) posit that the goal of using avoidance is to delay. It is appropriate to use this style when there are issues of low importance, to reduce tensions, or to buy time. Avoidance is also appropriate when you are in a low power position and have little control over the situation, when you need to allow others to deal with the conflict, or when the problem is symptomatic of a much larger issue and you need to work on the core issue. Moriarty stated that overuse of the avoidance style in school management can result to a low level of input, decision-making, and allowing issues to fester, which can produce a breakdown in communication between principals and teachers. Schuler (2014) offered procedures for turning dysfunctional conflict into functional conflict, Schuler stated that too many organizations tend to take a win-lose, competitive approach to conflict or at worst avoid conflict altogether. Such a negative view of conflict ensures that a group is ineffective and the activity within it becomes destructive. Schuler further buttressed that avoidance strategy is employed in conflict resolution when as issue is trivial in relation to other more pressing concerns, when there is no possibility of either settling or resolving the issue, when one of the parties has low power in relation to the other, and when the potential damage of confrontation outweighs the benefits of resolution.

Findings from this study also revealed that Principals and Teachers' of secondary schools agreed that accommodating approach contributes to effective management of schools. According to Vigil-King (2000), the adoption of accommodation strategy in managing conflict is likely to create better results and higher commitment in individuals than teams using non-integrative conflict management approach. Therefore, since schools operate in a competitive environment characterized with conflicting interests among principals and teachers, and among teachers and students, having a good understanding of when to adopt accommodation strategy in conflict situation in the school environment to mitigate imminent disruption can promote effective management of schools. In agreement with the above assertion, Gankar (2012) envisaged that this strategy is important in the effective management of organizations especially in a school because it leads to the identification of the source of the conflict which paves way for the finding of a solution acceptable by the conflicting parties (administrators and teachers, teachers and students, etc). Gankar remarked further that accommodation strategy has become a mechanism for resolving conflict which emphasizes absorption of conflicting parties' ideas about the conflict to facilitate the respect of conflicting interests of parties while resolving the conflict. The accommodating approach to conflict involves maintaining the interpersonal relationships at all costs, with little or no concern for the interests of the parties involved, it is however, a temporary style of conflict management where a principal makes effort to buy time as he/she seek cooperation in the school (Crossfield & Bourne, 2018). This style is characterized by mutual differences, but conflict is, at times, regarded as natural and healthy and accommodation as a conflict resolution strategy requires open confrontation coupled with an objective search for a common solution to the problem.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion made from the study, the conclusion reached by the researchers established the fact principals and teachers use avoidance and accommodation strategies for effective management of conflicts in secondary schools, and their related implications in the internal school management. Thus, the resolution is based on applying the appropriate strategy of conflict resolution based on the prevailing nature of the conflicts and circumstances surrounding the conflict situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the result obtained, the following recommendations were hereby made;

1. The school managers/administrators should identify the actual causes and nature of the conflict among the entire staff of the school before applying the available conflict techniques, strategies and methods at their disposals.
2. The management should always apply the best practice of win-win strategy that every individual in the conflict arena will not adjudge favouritism.
3. In spite of the nature of this study outcome, it is very imperative that the Schools Board should organize regular workshops, seminars, conferences and orientation programmes for principals and teachers on students' conflict management strategies. This is appropriate to improve these educators' knowledge, particularly the emerging ideas and innovations concerning students' conflicts management in schools.

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