Conflict Resolution Strategies and Effective Management of Public Secondary Schools in Delta State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on conflict resolution strategies and the effective management of public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. The study used a descriptive research method. The research population consisted of 473 principals and 14,482 teachers from 473 public high schools in Delta. Using simple random sampling, the sample size was 50 principals and 250 teachers. This study was based on two research questions and two hypotheses. A questionnaire developed by the researcher was used as a data collection tool. The mean and standard deviation were used to answer the study questions, and the hypotheses were tested using a Z-test with a significance level of 0.05, whereas the acceptance level scale was 2.50 for the research questions. The results indicate that conflict resolution strategies for effective management of secondary schools include adaptation and avoidance approaches. One recommendation based on the results was that school leaders should identify the true causes and nature of conflict before using available conflict management strategies. Governments should include conflict management training in teacher education curricula.

Keywords: conflict, avoidance, adaptation, effective management, resolution strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

In our daily lives, we work with individuals, teachers, schools, business leaders, government officials, and others to achieve specific goals for the benefit of society and individuals. In the process of teaching and learning, there is constant interaction to achieve educational goals. Conflict occurs naturally when people interact. Conflict occurs when people with different opinions and interests influence each other. These conflicts, if not properly managed, can hinder the achievement of intended goals (Ayalew, 2000).

Different groups and people in an organisational environment have different interests that they want to satisfy. When these interests collide, conflict is inevitable. Brown (2000) defines conflict as a form of interaction between parties with different understandings, perceptions, and preferences. The

process begins when one party discovers that one or more problems are being hampered or blocked by the other (Sisk, 2015). Managers need to be familiar with the dynamics of conflict in the workplace and how to resolve it. Conflict itself is neither good nor evil. However, whether a conflict is constructive or destructive depends on how it is resolved.

Conflicts can arise in many areas of the school, such as staffing, funding, educational activities and practises in and out of the classroom, rewards, disciplinary methods, use of authority, tardiness, political views, student behavior, negative personal attitudes, dress code, grading system, staff appointments and placements, and resource allocation (Yuan, 2010). The types of disputes that arise regarding high school operations vary from school to school. Conflicts can have positive or negative effects on

school performance, depending on the type of conflict and how it is handled (Asiegbu & Egboka 2013).

Therefore, the ability to manage or resolve conflicts is essential for school leaders to keep their schools running smoothly.As in any organization, conflict is inevitable in a school of mixed personalities. Conflict is destructive when it interferes with the smooth running of the school, leading to breakdowns in ineffective communication, poor working relationships, tensions, fights, poor performance, and animosity between team members (Bano, Ashraf, & Zia 2013). Well-managed conflicts, however, can have interests that contribute to the balance between solidarity and legitimate interests within the conflict group. Therefore, the ability to manage or resolve conflicts is essential for school leaders to keep their schools running smoothly.

The main goal of education management is to provide effective and quality education in the school system. Therefore, the administrative responsibility of school administrators should contribute to the achievement of these goals. One of these challenges is resolving conflicts that arise in school administration. Schools cannot run smoothly and progressively without teaching teachers how to deal with conflict.

Therefore, conflict resolution is a process of reducing differences in the other's ideals and viewpoints by encouraging interpersonal communication through mediation, bargaining, and negotiation (Bannon and Paul, 2003). The solution lies in reducing and eliminating almost all forms of conflict. Therefore, terms such as negotiation, bargaining, mediation, and arbitration are often used in dispute resolution. That is, it is a complex way to achieve positive or at least pleasant results. Principals and teachers participate in conflict resolution and management within the school system on issues related to students' discipline and management. The extent of dispute resolution depends on the efforts of the parties to fairly evaluate the gains and losses of negotiations (Odigwe, 2014).

Conflict resolution in schools is therefore necessary and can be skillfully done through action, avoidance, and adaptive strategies. An effective education manager solves problems rather than creating them. Therefore, to the extent that school organisations are interconnected and conflict is unavoidable, effective management is essential, and administrators or school leaders should identify the factors that cause conflict and take them into account to ensure the smooth running of the school. They are

expected to know the possible strategies for running the school. Against this background, this study examines the conflict resolution strategies and effective management of public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflict is an integral part of the human experience and a natural and inevitable social phenomenon. Chinwokwu (2013) defines conflict as friction that can arise when two or more people interact. It is an inevitable and unavoidable part of the human experience, rooted in the contradictory activities of individuals and groups. The other side must be connected by some social bond. This determines the degree of conflict that exists in the relationship and thus the strength of the expression of the conflict.

Conflict management is essential for containing conflict. This includes developing effective strategies at the macro level to minimise conflict dysfunction, improve constructive functioning, increase learning efficiency, and increase the effectiveness of the school system. (Rahim, 2002). Therefore, conflict management means maintaining the vitality, innovation, and creativity of the organisation by minimising conflicts within it. Achieving this always requires the use of good conflict management strategies. Gunuselli and Hacifaztioglu (2009) argued that conflict management involves diagnosing conflict and intervening through appropriate strategies to achieve organisational and personal goals.

Conflict resolution is more or less the reduction, elimination, or termination of any form or kind of dispute. Terms such as negotiation, mediation, and arbitration are therefore often used in dispute resolution. The effectiveness of dispute resolution depends on the extent to which the parties to the dispute consider the gains and losses made during the negotiation to be relatively fair (Odigwe, 2014). Thus, when conflicts arise in the school system, conflict resolution is necessary and can be skillfully achieved through mediation, competition, concessions, cooperation, avoidance, adaptation, accommodation, and coercive strategies.

Avoidance as a conflict resolution strategy is one in which the manager sees and hopes to step back, that this will not lead to confusion, or that the situation will resolve itself. It is distinguished by the lazy's inability to passivity. Ogunda (2011) suggested that

this approach could take the form of diplomatically ignoring the problem, postponing the problem, or simply getting out of a threatening situation. Hossein and Nassar (2010) argued that avoidance ignores or denies the possibility of conflict. For example, he can change the subject, postpone the discussion, or simply take over the subject. This avoidance strategy can be a very useful and constructive solution to effectively managing conflicts between school administrators and teachers. Avoidance allows the person involved to think more clearly and communicate more amicably after the emotion has subsided. According to Larna (2014), the use of avoidance as a method of conflict resolution promotes team building, shared identity building, and positive avoidance among staff, along with proper school administration.

Accommodation as a dispute resolution strategy is a yield-loss-win strategy in which one party makes concessions to the other party (or parties) in order to protect and maintain the relevant relationship. It is about maintaining interpersonal relationships regardless of the interests of those involved. Accommodation conflict resolution strategies improve academic performance because students feel more comfortable and can spend more time studying. Accommodation skills include the ability to sacrifice, be selfless, obey orders, and yield. Good resolutions and personal commitments are likely to be achieved (Vigil-King, 2000). This strategy focuses on acknowledging real or perceived conflicts as openly as possible and emphasising common interests. However, this is a temporary conflict resolution strategy that school leaders use to gain time in partnership with the school (Crossfield and Bourne, 2018).

Since schools operate in a competitive environment characterised by conflicts of interest between school leaders and teachers and between teachers and students, having a good understanding of when to adopt an accommodation strategy in conflict resolution can prevent inevitable failure and promote effective teaching and learning. Gankar (2012) argues that this strategy is important for the effective management of organizations, especially school systems. This will help determine the source of the conflict and find a solution that is right for the school and acceptable to the conflicting parties in the dispute.

3. **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The education system seems to be a controversial industry. This is due to the complexity of the design. Diverse groups with different backgrounds, opinions, goals, needs, and aspirations confirm the fact that conflict is an integral part of the system. For this reason, it is imperative that educational staff, especially school leaders and teachers, face conflict and resolution in order to work effectively and efficiently in schools. No wonder Flanagan and Runde (2010) argued that leaders and managers need to develop conflict resolution skills for organisations to thrive. Because school administrators and teachers are rarely confronted with conflict dynamics and the onset of resolution strategies, they frequently misinterpret emerging conflicts and employ inappropriate conflict resolution strategies based on the facts. When this happens, it increases the generation of conflicts, complicates ongoing conflicts, increases the level of conflicts, and impairs teachers' productivity. Against this background, this study investigated conflict resolution strategies and effective management of public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria.

4. **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The primary goal of this research is to investigate school principals' conflict resolution strategies and the effective management of Delta State's public secondary schools. The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. To examine how accommodation as a conflict resolution strategy contributes to the effective management of public secondary schools.
2. Determine how avoidance as a conflict resolution strategy contributes to the effective management of public secondary schools.

5. **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following survey questions guided the survey:

1. How does accommodation contribute to effective conflict resolution management of public secondary schools in Delta State?
2. How does the OIDANCE conflict resolution strategy contribute to the effective management of public high schools in Delta State?

6. **HYPOTHESES**

In this study, the following null hypotheses were tested:

1.   There is no significant difference between the perceptions of principals and teachers on How accommodation as a conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of public secondary schools in Delta State

2.   There is no significant difference between principals and teachers on how they view avoidance as a conflict resolution strategy aids in the effective management of public secondary schools in Delta State.

7. METHODOLOGY

The study design used in this study was descriptive. An attempt was made to collect responses from principals and teachers on conflict resolution strategies and effective management of public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. The research population consists of principals and teachers from 473 Delta public high schools. A sample size of 250 teachers and 50 principals was determined using a simple random sampling procedure. The data collection tool was a 10-item structured questionnaire. The survey was conducted on a 4-point scale from "strongly agree" (SA) to "strongly disagree." Agree (A), Disagree (D), or Strongly Disagree (SD). The content and face validity of the tool were determined through peer review by two experts in the field. The Cronbach Alpha method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument and gave a coefficient of 0.78. The researcher, in collaboration with three research assistants, administered the instrument to the respondents. This ensures that the instrument is delivered and returned as soon as possible. Questions were analysed using the mean and standard deviation. The acceptance criterion was 2.50, and the mean below this criterion was rejected, but a Z-test was used to test the hypotheses at the significance level of 0.05.

8. RESULTS PRESENTATION

Research Question 1: Mow does accommodation as conflict resolution strategy contribute to effective management of public secondary schools in Delta State?

Table 1: Reponses on how accommodation as conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of schools.

S/N	Items	TeachersN-250			Principals N - 50		
		X	Std	Rinks	X	Std	Rinks
1	Creates better results and higher commitment between staff and students.	2.81	0.18	Agree	3.0	0.42	Agree
2	Leads to the identification of the source of conflict between staff and students	3.12	0.20	Agree	2.96	0.42	Agree
◁⟩	Makes administrators to ignore self-interest by satisfying others concern.	3.97	0.25	Agree	3.18	0.45	Agree
4	It is used when staff and students are willing to make concession with the hope of getting something in return.	3.27	0.21	Agree	3.16	0.45	Agree
5	It is associated with playing down the differences and emphasizing harmony to satisfy the concern of the other party	3.20	0.20	Agree	3.2	0.45	Agree
	Grand mean & STD	3.27	0.21	Agree	3.10	0.44	Agree

To put it another way, how will society respond to the increasing software disruption in industrial complexes and human organizations? In terms of job security, UBER software is emerging as the world's largest taxi company (wilt drivers job losses), AirBnB is the world's largest hotel company without owning properties (did Hilton hotels see it coming), and we manage computers exponentially better and

faster than ever before. This year, a computer defeated every human opponent on the planet—a feat unimaginable even ten years ago.

The data presented in table 1 reveals teachers' mean scores of 2.81, 3.12, 3.97, 3.27 and 3.20 while principal responses indicates mean score, of 3.0, 2.96, 3.18, 3.16 and 3.2. The table indicated an average grand mean of 3.27 and standard deviation of 0.21 for teachers, and 3.10 and standard deviation of 0.44 for principals, all the items had a mean score of above 2.50 which was set for the study, which implies that the respondents agreed that

accommodation as conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of secondary schools.

Research question 2: How does avoidance as conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of public secondary schools in Delta State?

Table 2; Responses on how avoidance as conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of schools.

S/N	Items	Teachers N-250			Principals N – 50		
		X	Std	Rmks	X	Std	Rmks
6	Staff and students are encouraged to ignore the conflicting issues for peace to reign in the school.	3.12	0.20	Agree	3.10	0.44	Agree
7	It is adopted by principals and teachers when words may become so heated.	3.42	0.22	Agree	3.14	0.44	Agree
8	Conflicting matters were set-aside due to pressing academic, and administrative issues	3.23	0.20	Agree	3.28	0.46	Agree
9	Students do forgo their conflict to avoid immediate sanctions by the school.	3.28	0.21	Agree	3.12	0.44	Agree
in	Students are afraid to pursue matters against the school authority but instead seek for leniency.	3.29	0.21	Agree	3.28	0.46	Agree
	Grand mean & STD	3.27	0.21	Agree	3.18	0.45	Agree

Table 2 above, showed the responses of teachers with mean scores of 3.12, 3.42, 3.23, 3.28 and-3.29, while principals responses revealed the mean scores of 3.10, 3.14, 3.28, 3.12, and 3.28. The table also indicated an average grand mean of 3.27 and standard deviation of 0.21 for teachers and mean of 3.18 and standard deviation of 0.45 for principals which implied that the respondents accepted to all the items that avoidance as conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of secondary schools.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the perception of teachers and principals on how avoidance as conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of public secondary schools in Delta state.

Table 3: Z-test analysis of the significant difference between teachers and principals on how accommodation as conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of secondary schools.

Group	N	X	SD	Z-cal	Z-critical	Decision
Teachers	250	3.27	0.21	0.77	1.96	Not significant
Principals	50	3.10	0.44			

The result on table 3 revealed that the Z-calculated (0.77) was less than the Z-critical (1.96) at 0.05 level of significant level. Therefore the null hypothesis of no

significant different between the perceptions of teachers and principals on how accommodation as

a conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of secondary schools is hereby accepted. Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the perceptions of teachers and principals on how avoidance as conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of public secondary schools in Delta state.

Table 4: Z-test analysis of the perceptions of teachers and principals on how avoidance as a conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of secondary schools.

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Group	N	X	SD	Z-cal	Z-critical		Decision
Teachers	250	3.27	0.21	0.41	1.96		Not significant
Principals	50	3.18	0.45				

The data presented in table 4 above, indicated that the Z-calculated value of 0.41 was less than the /.-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the perceptions of teachers and principals on how avoidance as a conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of secondary schools is hereby accepted.

9.   DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings on hypothesis one indicated that no significant difference exists in the perceptions of principals and teachers on how accommodation as a conflict resolution strategy contributes to effective management of schools. This is in line with Vigil-King (2000), who asserted that adopting an accommodation strategy in managing conflict is likely to create better results and higher employee commitment, both of which contribute to effective management of schools. This is in line with Vigil-King (2000), who asserted that adopting an accommodation strategy in managing conflict is likely to create better results and higher employee commitment. Also, Gankar (2012) opined that this strategy is important in the effective management of organizations, especially schools, because it leads to the identification of the source of the conflict, which leads to the finding of a solution acceptable to the conflicting parties (principals and teachers, teachers and students, etc.). Therefore, as schools operate in a competitive environment characterised by conflicting interests among principals and teachers and between teachers and students, having a good understanding of when to adopt an accommodation strategy in a conflict situation in the school environment to mitigate imminent disruption can promote effective management of schools. This approach to conflict involves maintaining the interpersonal relationship at all costs with little or no

concern for the interests of the parties involved; however, it is a temporary style of conflict management where a principal makes an effort to buy time as he/she seeks cooperation in the school (Crossfield & Bourne, 2018).

Hypothesis 2 indicates that school principals and teachers agree that avoidance practises contribute to effective learning. In reality, there is no discernible difference in the perception of avoidance strategies in conflict resolution. This is consistent with his Ogunda (2011) statement that avoidance style is a very useful and constructive tool for resolving school conflicts between principals and teachers. This allows the parties to think more rationally and stay together even after their emotions have subsided. Also, Lorna (2014) adduced that 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 properly handled by school administrators. In fact, avoidance is a common denominator that served to increase the effectiveness of staff, ease their relationship with management, and provide support for individual members in a time of unrest.

10.   CONCLUSION

Conflict management is an important skill because running a school is complex. The complexity of running a school is full of conflict. Therefore, it is important to make sure the school system is not wrong when it comes to conflict, and it is very important that conflict not interfere with school activities. The use of accommodation and avoidance strategies for effective conflict management in schools has been demonstrated. Therefore, depending on the general nature of the dispute and the circumstances surrounding it, it will be resolved through the

application of appropriate conflict resolution strategies.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Research indicates that the following recommendations are needed:

1. Teacher education curricula should familiarize prospective teachers with the nature, dynamics, and strategies for resolving school conflicts.
2. School leaders must determine the true causes and nature of conflicts among all staff before using available conflict management strategies.
3. Principals must always use progressive, win-win strategies to face all opponents.
4. Governments should hold seminars, conferences, and orientations on a regular basis. programmes for school leaders and teachers on conflict management strategies.

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