

PRINCIPALS' APPLICATION OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

This study ascertained the principals' application of conflict management strategies for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State. Three research questions guided the study and three null hypotheses were tested. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all the 257 principals in public secondary schools in Anambra State. All the 257 principals were used for the study due to small and manageable size of the population of the study. The researchers-developed instrument titled 'Principals' Application of Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire (PACMSQ)' was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach alpha and it yielded reliability co-efficients of 0.81, 0.86 and 0.84 for clusters I, II and III respectively and the overall coefficient of the entire instrument was 0.84. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while z-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed among others that the compromising strategies applied by principals for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State included organising meeting for opposing parties to negotiate and reach an agreement, rendering counseling services to conflicting parties on the need to reach an agreement, allowing opposing parties to make inputs in resolving conflicts and encouraging conflicting parties to be satisfied with the final decision irrespective of who wins or losses in the conflict. It also found out that, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on their integrating strategies for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that the state government through the Post Primary School Service Commission (PPSSC) should organize regular conference, workshops and seminars to update secondary school principals' skills and knowledge in applying various conflict management strategies.

Introduction

Personnel in education institutions have different ideologies, culture, value and role preferences and this makes conflict inevitable and ubiquitous in schools. Conflict is a disagreement or opposition between two or more parties. This often results to clash, argument and collision among others. This argument is in consonance with the contention made by Adeyemi and Ademilua (2012) that conflict is all forms of opposition, disagreement, friction between two or more parties and it manifests in the forms of arguments, protests, demonstration, aggression and other destructive behaviours. It arises from incompatibility of interest, needs, values and ideas among others. In the same vein, Premchandani (2014) pointed out that conflict may arise between two individuals when there is high level of interdependence, having different goals, ideas, needs, value systems, perceptions, expectations, interests or incompatible personalities. Conflict occurs when personnel in school disagree or take opposing stands concerning issues and this can be expressed through argument, protest or any form of action. Atieno, Kiplagat and Yego (2016) stressed that conflicts are inevitable, it is believed that there will always be disagreements among school administration, teachers and students. Furthermore, Atieno et al stressed that conflicts may present through; students not obeying school rules, students not doing manual work, students not respecting teachers, students engaging in vices like theft, fights, bullying or not attending lessons; teachers not respecting the principal or not completing curriculum, the principal's style of leadership demeaning teachers and disregarding students, among others. Adeyemi (2010) reported that in the Nigerian school system, conflict occurs from time to time.

The strategies for managing conflict have remained topical issues in every organization. At secondary school level, it is one of the duties of principals to manage conflict in order to reduce the negative outcomes of disputes and promote a calm atmosphere for effective teaching and learning. To buttress this, Atieno et al stressed that since conflicts have the potential of advancing to more confiscation by day, the principals have to put in place management mechanisms for putting them in check so that they do not unnecessarily cause physical, psychological or emotional problems. Conflict management strategies are the practices, mechanisms or techniques applied in minimizing, recognizing, handling and settling disputes in a balanced or rational way. Many scholars have identified different conflict management strategies being used in organizations. Kalagbor and Nnokam (2015) outlined conflict management strategies to include: integrating, compromising, avoiding, and dominating. In a related study, Sasa, Mateja and Joze (2011) identified conflict management strategies as: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and

compromising. The conflict management strategies of the above authors which were adopted in this study included: integrating strategies, compromising strategies and dominating strategies. There is no best conflict management strategy; it is essential for principals to supply the strategy that fits best in the situation at hand. Application is the art of putting strategies, policies, techniques or anything into use in order to achieve pre-determined objectives.

Integrating strategy as a way of managing conflict involves gathering and organizing information about a dispute before the final decision is made in resolving the conflict. Sasa, Mateja and Joze (2011) pointed out that this strategy involves openness, the exchange of information and examination of difference to reach an effective solution acceptable to both parties. Kalagbor and Nnokam (2015) asserted that this strategy enables parties involved in conflict to pool all their information together, put their differences on the table and examine them along with any data that might contribute to a resolution. Furthermore, Kalagbor and Nnokam pointed out that this leads to the development of alternative solution which addresses all parts of the conflict, other than the initial solutions of the parties.

Compromising strategy is a technique in which, the needs of every person involved in disagreement or opposition is taken into account before the final decision is made in resolving the conflicts. In this strategy, both parties have to make sacrifice so as to settle the dispute. This strategy allows conflicting parties to express and understand each other's needs and thus reach concessions in resolving the conflict. In compromise, each person has something to give and something to take (Kalagbor & Nnokam, 2015). Principals need to create open dialogue, provide answer that is fair to both parties in this dispute and assign value to all aspects of the conflict issues in order to effectively apply this strategy. Sasa et al (2011) stressed that this strategy involves give-and-take whereby both parties give up something to arrive at a mutually acceptable decision. Arguing in the same line Akuffo, (2015) pointed out that in this strategy, parties deliberately come to consensus to forgo something which is very important to both parties for agreement to be reached.

Dominating strategy is more of autocratic means of managing conflict. Wekhian (2015) stressed that dominating strategy involves forcing one's views on others. In applying dominating strategies, principals employ tactics in resolving conflict without considering the view of parties involved. Principal that applies this strategy in managing conflict dictate the solution to the issues at the moment. This strategy does not allow inputs from the conflicting parties in the school system. When time is short and quick decision is needed to resolve dispute, this strategy is appropriate. However, when this

strategy is often used, it could escalate the conflict, breed resentment and create poor interpersonal relationship in the school.

Multiple studies have investigated the influence of gender in the application of conflict management strategies. Gender is a physical, biological and behavioural characteristics which differentiate masculinity and femininity. A study carried out by Asemamaw and Narayana (2014) in Ethiopia reported that gender had a significant impact on the compromising and integrating conflict management strategies preference of a manager, meanwhile, these differences were not found for avoiding, dominating and obliging conflict management strategies. In a related study conducted by Babajide (2013) in south-western Nigeria, it was revealed that there was no significant difference between male and female managers conflict management strategies preference. A similar study conducted by Premchandani (2014) it was indicated that there was no significant difference between male and female management conflict management strategies. These research studies show that the influence of gender on conflict management strategies has yielded inconsistent results and thus the need to investigate gender as a moderating variable in the study. This will give a more visible picture of gender's influence on the application of conflict management strategies in Anambra State. When there is minimum conflict in the school, all activities or programmes are likely to be effectively administered and students learn better.

Effective school administration is the ability of the school manager to apply principles, policies and appropriate practices so as to help bring about optimum achievement of the school pre-determined objectives. In the same view, Alabi (2017) defined effective school administration as the ability of the school manager to help bring about optimum achievement of the school pre-determined objectives. Effective school administration is evident in excellent academic performance of students, motivation and supervision of staff personnel to improve their performance, good school-community relations, proper financial record, conflict and school plant management among others. In the view of Ereh and Okon (2015) when an administrator or principal is able to successfully manage all the school's instruction programmes and the various academic activities in school, monitor teachers' progress and job performance, using their record appropriately, recommending staff for development, motivating them accordingly through various welfare scheme, recommending them for promotion when due and being interested in their personal matters, then one can describe such an administrator as an effective administrator. Co-operation and support which could only exist in the absence of or management of conflict in the workplace is imperative for smooth school

administration. All these point to the fact that conflict management is very important for effective school administration. However, evidence abound that conflict exists in secondary schools in Anambra State and has been observed to have most often threatened the peaceful co-existence of principals, staff and students (Ezeugbor, Onyali & Okoye, 2015). Conflict that exists in secondary schools in Anambra State appears to be evident in principals' criticism of staff in front of students, teachers rude words in response to principal, exchange of unpleasant words among principals and staff, poor interpersonal relationship, hatred among principals and staff, teachers' gossiping of principals among others. With all these unpleasant situations surrounding secondary schools in Anambra State, it becomes imperative to ascertain principals' application of conflict management strategies for school effective administration in the state.

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the integrating strategies applied by principals for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. What are the dominating strategies applied by principals for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State?
3. What are the compromising strategies applied by principals for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State?

While the underlisted hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on their integrating strategies for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on their dominating strategies principals for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on their compromising strategies principals for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State.

Method

A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The area of the study was Anambra State. The population of the study comprised 257 principals of all the 257 public secondary schools in Anambra State. All the 257 principals were used for the study due to small and manageable size of the population of the study. The researchers-developed instrument titled "Principals' Application of Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire (PACMSQ)" was used for data collection. The 16-items instrument was

structured on a four rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach alpha and it yielded reliability co-efficients of 0.81, 0.86 and 0.84 for clusters I, II and III respectively and the overall coefficient of the entire instrument was 0.84. The researchers with the help of six research assistants who are secondary school teachers in Anambra State collected data for this study. Mean and standard deviation were used in answering the research questions. The mean response were adjudged on the following basis of any mean score of 2.50 or above is taken to indicate agreement while any mean score that falls below 2.50 is taken as disagreement. z-test was used in testing the three null hypotheses.

Results

Table 1: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation Scores of Integrating Strategies applied by Principals for Effective Administration

S/N	ITEMS	Male Principals (N = 110)			Female Principals (N =134)		
		Mean	SD	Decision	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Constituting committee to investigate conflicting issues in school	2.56	1.12	Agree	2.54	1.08	Agree
2	Gathering information about conflict issues	2.67	1.14	Agree	2.60	1.24	Agree
3	Analyzing information relating to conflict in school before making decision	2.52	1.09	Agree	2.55	1.10	Agree
4	Diagnosing conflict at the emerging stage	2.45	1.10	Disagree	2.48	1.03	Disagree
5	Double-checking information sources to be sure of the right facts before using it to resolve conflict	2.65	1.13	Agree	2.57	1.04	Agree

Table 1 showed that male and female principals mean ratings for all items except 4 are above 2.50 indicating agreement with the statements. The finding of this study reveals that the integrating strategies applied by principals for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State included constituting committee to investigate conflicting issues in school, gathering information about conflict issues, analyzing information relating to

conflict in school before making decision and double-checking information sources to be sure of the right facts before using it to resolve conflict

Table 2: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation Scores of Dominating Strategies applied by Principals for Effective Administration

S/N	ITEMS	Male Principals (N = 110)			Female Principals (N =134)		
		Mean	SD	Decision	Mean	SD	Decision
6	Using of threats to resolve conflict in school	2.56	1.12	Agree	2.55	1.01	Agree
7	Forcing opposing parties to ignore the conflicting issues for peace to reign in school	2.40	1.03	Disagree	2.42	1.04	Disagree
8	Taking hasty decision in resolving conflict without consulting anybody	2.45	1.20	Disagree	2.38	1.11	Disagree
9	Denying parties involved in a conflict the opportunity of participating in conflict resolution process	2.34	1.00	Disagree	2.40	1.04	Disagree
10	Persuading conflict parties to forgo their conflicts to avoid immediate sanctions	2.50	1.23	Agree	2.55	1.13	Agree
11	Coercing parties involved to apologise to each other so to resolve the conflict	2.39	1.00	Disagree	2.51	1.15	Agree

Table 2 revealed that the mean ratings for items 6 and 10 by both male and female principals are above 2.50 indicating agreement with the statements. Items 7, 8 and 9 were rated below 2.50 by male and female principals and this indicated disagreement with the statements. Mean ratings of male principals for item 11 is 2.39 which is below 2.50 indicating disagreement with the statement, while that of female principals for the item is 2.51 which is above 2.50 indicating agreement with the statement. The result of data analysis revealed that principals disagree that their dominating strategies applied for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State included forcing opposing parties to ignore the conflicting issues for peace to reign in school, denying parties involved in a conflict the opportunity of participating in conflict and taking hasty decision in resolving conflict without consulting anybody among others.

Table 3: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation Scores of Compromising Strategies applied by Principals for Effective Administration

S/N	ITEMS	Male Principals (N = 110)			Female Principals (N =134)		
		Mean	SD	Decision	Mean	SD	Decision
12	Organising meeting for opposing parties to negotiate and reach an agreement	2.67	1.07	Agree	2.58	1.05	Agree
13	Rendering counseling services to conflicting parties on the need to reach an agreement	2.64	1.10	Agree	2.68	1.02	Agree
14	Allowing opposing parties to make inputs in resolving conflicts	2.51	1.16	Agree	2.51	1.19	Agree
15	Encouraging conflicting parties to be satisfied with the final decision irrespective of who wins or losses in the conflict.	2.57	1.20	Agree	2.53	1.10	Agree
16	Advising parties to forgo important thing in order to come to consensus	2.43	1.21	Disagree	2.41	1.14	Disagree

Results of data analysis as shown on Table 3 revealed that the mean ratings of both male and female principals for all items except item 16 are above 2.50 indicating agreement with the statements. The finding of this study show that principals' agreed that their compromising strategies applied for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State included organizing meeting for opposing parties to negotiate and reach an agreement, rendering counseling services to conflicting parties on the need to reach an agreement, allowing opposing parties to make inputs in resolving conflicts and encouraging conflicting parties to be satisfied with the final decision irrespective of who wins or losses in the conflict.

Table 4: Z-Test of the Mean Ratings of Male and Female Principals on their Integrating Strategies for Effective Administration of schools

Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	z-cal.	z-crit.	df ∞	Remarks
Male	110	12.85	5.58	0.15	1.96	242	0.05 Not Significant
Female	134	12.74	5.49				

Table 4 indicated that at .05 significant level and 242 degree of freedom, the calculated z value of 0.15 is less than the critical z value of 1.96. The difference in male and female principals mean ratings is not significant. The null hypothesis one is therefore not rejected. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on their integrating strategies for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 5: Z-Test of the Mean Ratings of Male and Female Principals on their Dominating Strategies for Effective Administration of schools

Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	z-cal.	z-crit.	df ∞	Remarks
Male	110	14.64	6.58	0.20	1.96	242	0.05 Not Significant
Female	134	14.81	6.48				

Table 5 indicated that at .05 significant level and 242 degree of freedom, the calculated z value of 0.20 is less than the critical z value of 1.96. The difference in male and female principals mean ratings is not significant. The null hypothesis one is therefore not rejected. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on their dominating strategies for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 6: Z-Test of the Mean Ratings of Male and Female Principals on their compromising Strategies for Effective Administration of schools

Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	z-cal.	z-crit.	df ∞	Remarks
Male	110	12.82	5.74	0.15	1.96	242	0.05 Not Significant
Female	134	12.71	5.50				

Table 6 indicated that at .05 significant level and 242 degree of freedom, the calculated z value of 0.15 is less than the critical z value of 1.96. The difference in male and female principals mean ratings is not significant. The null hypothesis one is therefore not rejected. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on their compromising strategies for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State.

Discussion

The study found out that the integrating strategies applied by principals for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State included constituting committee to investigate conflicting issues in school, gathering information about conflict issues, analyzing information relating to conflict in school before making decision and double-checking information sources to be sure of the right facts before using it to resolve conflict. This is line with the finding of Ntide (2015) which reported that most school managers employ integrating strategies in managing conflict. This is also supported by Kalagbor and Nnokam (2015) who reported that principals use integrating strategy in the management of conflict in secondary schools. These integrating strategies applied by principals imply that they engage in active search for fact or information about a conflict in school before managing it. This strategy gives principals the opportunity to better prepare and collect information before acting. This is usually necessary for creating high quality settlement in conflict. The finding of this study also revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on their integrating strategies for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State. This is supported by the finding of Babajide (2013) which revealed that there was no significant difference between male and female managers conflict management strategies preference. This contradicts the finding of Asemamaw and Narayana (2014) which reported that gender had a significant impact on the integrating conflict management strategies preference of a manager. This contradiction could be attributed to difference in geographical location. The similarity in the mean ratings of male and female secondary principals in Anambra State is not surprising as they are exposed to the same kind of training to acquire skills and knowledge on conflict management strategies.

It was discovered that the dominating strategies applied by principals for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State do not include forcing opposing parties to ignore the conflicting issues for peace to reign in school, denying parties involved in a conflict the opportunity of participating in conflict and taking hasty decision in resolving conflict with consulting anybody among others. This is in agreement with the finding of Kalagbor and Nnokam (2015) principals do not use frequently dominating strategy in the management of conflicts. This implies secondary school principals in Anambra State do not use force in managing conflict. Ineffective application of this strategy may not provide quick resolution to a conflict. Application of this strategy is appropriate for an emergency situation. Principals' stand for position believed to be right in resolving conflict when

applying this strategy. This strategy may be effective, if principals have strong legal justification for their decisions or actions. The study also reported that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on their dominating strategies for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State. This is in agreement with the finding of Asemamaw and Narayana (2014) which reported that there was no significant difference found for avoiding, dominating management strategies of managers. The test of hypotheses was not significant probably because of the fact that female and male principals in Anambra State apply similar policies in managing conflict and they may likely show their similar opinion.

The study also reported that the compromising strategies applied by principals for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State included organising meeting for opposing parties to negotiate and reach an agreement, rendering counseling services to conflicting parties on the need to reach an agreement, allowing opposing parties to make inputs in resolving conflicts and encouraging conflicting parties to be satisfied with the final decision irrespective of who wins or losses in the conflict. This agrees with the finding of Aigboje and Uwaifo (2013) which indicated that managers of secondary school use compromising strategies in resolving conflicts. This also supported the finding of Kalagbor and Nnokam (2015) which revealed that principals use the compromising strategy in the management of conflicts. This implies that secondary school principals in Anambra State typically calls for both parties involved in dispute to give up elements of their position in order to establish an acceptable solution to the conflicting issue. The principals play an intermediate role or seek quick middle-ground position in managing conflict. Principals' application of this strategy leads to solving of the actual clashes. It reinforces mutual trust and respect and builds a foundation for effective cooperation in future. This also lowers the levels of tension and stress resulting from the conflict. The study also indicated that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on their compromising strategies for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State. This is in agreement with the finding of Premchandani (2014) which reported that there was no significant difference between male and female management conflict management strategies. This is disagreement with the finding of Asemamaw and Narayana (2014) which reported that gender had a significant impact on the compromising conflict management strategies preference of a manager. The difference in findings could be attributed to difference in geographically location. The test of hypotheses was not significant probably because of the fact that female and

male principals in Anambra State face related kind of conflicts are bound to apply similar strategies in managing them.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that secondary school principals apply most of conflict management strategies except dominating strategies. Also, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on their conflict management strategies for effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

1. The state government through the Post Primary School Service Commission (PPSSC) should organize regular conference, workshops and seminars to update secondary school principals' skills and knowledge in applying various conflict management strategies.
2. Secondary school principals should apply dominating strategy in managing conflict especially in an emergency situation and there is a strong legal justification for their decisions or actions.
3. The State Ministry of Education should establish conflict management offices in public secondary schools and charged to handle conflict in schools.

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