

## **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING SECONDARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION IN IMO STATE**

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### **Abstract**

*The study investigated conflict management strategies for improving secondary school administration in Imo State. It was a descriptive survey carried out in Imo State Secondary Schools with Senior Secondary School Principals (SSSP) and Junior Secondary School Principal (JSSP) as the respondents. The population of the study was 482 principals in the 274 secondary schools from the six education zones of Imo State. The study was a census study no sample was conducted. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-made questionnaire. The researcher collected the instrument with the help of a trained research assistant. The instrument was adequately validated by 3 experts in the relevant field. Mean rating, ranking and t- test statistics were used to analyze the data collected. The finding revealed that five strategies out of the 10 listed for conflict management were effective for improving secondary school administration and out of all the strategies, negotiation was the most effective. Based on the findings the researchers recommended among others that the relevant authority should train principals on effective conflict management strategies for better administration service delivery.*

### **Introduction**

Management remains the most viable process of achieving educational and organizational objectives, within a changing environment by balancing

efficiency, effectiveness and cooperation, obtaining the most from limited resources and working with and through people. However, this is achievable in the absence of conflict. Effective management of secondary school is largely dependent on the cordiality and cooperation among the various stakeholders which according to Ibezim (2016), include the administrators, the teachers, the parents, the communities and the learners respectively. One of the greatest threats to successful school administration is conflict. Amaechi (2015), asserted that conflict has been a cog in the wheel of the progress of secondary school system in Nigeria. In consent to that, Obasi and Obi (2017), added that the process of teaching and learning in school is fraught with conflict. Conflict to many authors is inevitable and if unresolved and properly managed has negative impact on the learners, teachers, administrators, other stakeholders and the nation at large. This situation prompted this study on conflict management strategies for improving secondary school administration in Imo State. The major focus and concept x-rayed in the study is conflict management. Secondary school administration will also gain attention for better understanding.

Conflict management is one of the administrative tasks of school administrators which have to do with finding a solution to problems or conflict. Or a method designed to develop peaceful means of amicably ending a state of conflict. Onye (2012), described conflict management as a variety of approaches arrived at by the administrators to terminate conflicts through the use of constructive ideas which will result into the parties in conflict being mutually satisfied with the outcome of the settlement and the conflict being resolved in a true sense of it. To this, Obizue (2016), added that this can only be achieved in Nigerian schools, if school administrators are sure or certain of the strategies they employ in conflict management. One may ask, what is conflict?

Conflict is a situation without peace. It is an overt struggle between individuals or groups. Obizue and Ahukanna (2017), asserted that conflict is a state of quarrel, confusion, bitter feelings or opposition.

Conflict in its simplest term, means a state of disagreement, controversy or opposition. It could mean the existence of a prolonged battle, struggle or clash. When people do not behave according to expectations and standards of the society. Conflicts also arise from failed agreements and other breach of relationship. Conflict according to Nwaike (2015), results because of individual differences in human race. He added that, no two individuals behave alike under the same circumstance as a result of individual, cultural, religious and societal differences.

Conflict is a negative act that depicts a situation in which people, group or countries are involved in a serious disagreement or argument which

in most cases results to violence. It is a situation in which there are opposing ideas, opinions, feelings or wishes. Conflicts begin when negative emotions exist but these can only become noticeable when incidents that manifest these negative reactions begin to appear in the relationship between or among individuals and groups. In secondary schools, conflict can arise between the various stakeholders or among different groups like; principal and teachers, teacher and teacher, teacher and learners, teachers and parents or even the school as a whole and host communities. When a conflict situation is not well managed or resolved, achieving educational goal becomes a mirage. It becomes imperative to establish strategies of improving conflict management in secondary schools. Conflict management in secondary school is a triple concept study that involves management, conflict and secondary education which maybe better understood with individual conceptual dialects.

Management is a process of achieving organizational objectives, through the process of coordinating available resources via planning, organizing, controlling and leading the human resources to effectively and efficiently pursuing the set goals in a peaceful and conducive atmosphere (Obizue, 2016). The principal as the manager of secondary school should use all the managerial skills available to him in the organization and directing of staff, planning of work, setting standards of achievement and measuring their results, reviewing procedures, and quantifying different courses of actions all aimed at effective decision making and problem solving.

The principal is the sole administrator of the secondary school in Nigeria. Secondary school is majorly the second stage of formal education that takes off immediately after primary education. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013), secondary education is meant to prepare learners for useful living within the society and for higher education. Hence, Achike (2016), opined that effective administration of Nigerian secondary school system, to a large extent, depends on a cordial and cooperate working relationship among the principals, teachers, proprietors, parents, communities and learners. The harmonious working relationship, mutual implementation of decisions, and peaceful academic environment will be jeopardized, if the school and members of the school community are often in conflict. However, the ubiquity of conflict within the secondary school system should not be viewed as a misnomer but rather as an integral part of the school system which arises as a consequence of convergence of different actors who pursue different and sometimes incompatible interest and goals. Wherever there are interests and goals to be achieved, there exists conflict. In consent to this, Nwagwu (2016), added that conflict management is in the list of administrative roles of school administrators and requires rap attention.

It is also widely acknowledged that violence against teachers, learners and other stakeholders, destruction of school property both in the learning institution and surrounding communities has greatly increase in the past years. Conflict is part and parcel of the school and the school administrator cannot shy away from it, because it is experienced daily in the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, workplace conflict is inevitable, and if not well managed or unresolved has negative impacts that reach far beyond the principal parties.

Conflict management refers to attempts to control or regulate conflict through a number of measures. Successful conflict management occurs by listening to and providing opportunities to meet the needs of all the parties and to adequately address interests, so that, each party is satisfied with the outcome. The art of conflict management according to Nze (2016) is grounded on the fundamental principles of management processes as outlined by Fredrick Taylor. Conflict management as a process entails assembling of activities of planning and monitoring the performance of a process, especially in the sense of a conflict resolution process. It involves the application of knowledge, skills, tools, techniques and systems to define, visualize, measure, with the goal to harmonious environment of co existence.

In managing conflicts, it is pertinent to know the causes of such conflicts and the influence it will have on the school system, as well as the methods of resolving conflicts which may include; compromising, avoiding and competing. Conflict management is the ability to deal with every situation that involves personal interactions involving differences of opinions. It is a process of designing plans and implementing strategies to ensure that conflicts are prevented or resolved effectively. This can be achieved by the use of appropriate strategies.

Strategies for conflict management are those skills for managing and peacefully resolving conflict. Diagnosing conflict in a given situation is the basis for choosing appropriate management strategy. Different conflict management strategies are suggested by different authors. Obizue and Ahukanna (2017), listed eight strategies as; application of Grit theory, synergy, separation device, prayer device, tolerance and culture of civility, empathy device, effective catharsis, conflict resolution management and leadership style.

Okafor (2016), listed another eight techniques as follows: problem solving, super ordinate goals, avoidance, smoothing, compromising, authoritative command, altering the human variables. Other strategies mentioned by authors are suppression, third party interruption, cooperation, democratic process, job rotation and confrontation. According to Ibezim

(2017), authors like Adeyemi and Ademilua (2010), Carter and Robbin (2001), are all in line with Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). They collectively proffered the various methods of conflict management strategies to include; collective bargaining, reconciliation, negotiation, mediation, settlement conferences and arbitration. Generally, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) refers to any process or collection of processes established to resolve disputes without court trial or violence. With all these strategies unveiled, it is therefore imperative that principals adopt non – violent techniques in managing conflict with a view to increasing the level of productivity in the system. More importantly, the increasing cases of conflicts and youth violence in secondary schools across the country and in Imo State in particular necessitated the urgent need to address this escalating problem through proactive and effective and non violent strategies for improving conflict in secondary school administration in Imo State.

Two research questions and one hypothesis were guided the study

- 1 .What are the strategies for conflict management in secondary school administration?
- 2 Which of the strategies is the most effective in conflict management in secondary school administration?

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of junior and senior secondary school principals on the conflict management strategies for improving secondary school administration.

### **Method**

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The area of this study is in Imo State. The population of the study comprised of the 482 principals in the 274 secondary schools from the six education zones of Imo State. All the 274 Senior Secondary School (SSSP) and 226 Junior Secondary School Principal (JSSP) responded to the study as such it was a census study. Therefore, there was no need for sampling. The instrument for data collection was a researcher- made questionnaire. The cronbach alpha was used to determine the reliability of the instrument with a co-efficient value of 0.82. The instrument was validated by three experts in the relevant field. Mean rating and ranking were used to answer the research questions at the ceiling mark of 2.50 while the hypothesis was tested with t-test statistics at an alpha level of 0.05.

**Results****Table 1:** Mean Responses of Principals on Effective Strategies for Conflict Management in Secondary School Administration

S/N	Item Statement	SSSP		JSSP		$\bar{X}$	SD	
		$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD			
1	Collective Bargaining	2.90	0.62	2.80	0.60	2.85	0.65	Agree
2	Reconciliation	2.60	0.50	2.60	0.50	2.60	0.50	Agree
3	Negotiation	2.50	0.45	2.60	0.50	2.55	0.48	Agree
4	Mediation	2.40	0.40	2.50	0.45	2.45	0.46	Disagree
5	Settlement conferences	2.80	0.60	2.60	0.50	2.70	0.55	Agree
6	Arbitration	2.20	0.30	2.10	0.20	2.15	0.25	Disagree
7	Suppression	2.10	0.20	2.30	0.35	2.20	0.30	Disagree
8	Third-party intervention	2.40	0.40	2.50	0.45	2.45	0.46	Disagree
9	Democratic process	2.60	0.50	2.80	0.60	2.70	0.55	Agree
10	Confrontation	2.10	0.20	2.40	0.30	2.15	0.25	Disagree
<b>Weighed Mean</b>		2.45	0.42	2.50	0.45			

The result in Table 1 shows that the SSSP and JSSP agree that only five of the strategies (items 1,5,9,2 and 3) with mean scores of 2.85, 2.70, 2.70, 2.60 and 2.55 are effective for conflict management in secondary school administration. Others were below 2.50 and were not agreed upon as effective strategies.

**Table 2:** Mean Rating of Principals on the Most Effective Strategy for Conflict Management in Secondary School Administration.

S/N	Statement Item	Rank	SSSP		JSSP		$\bar{X}$	SD	
			$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD			
1	Negotiation is the most effective strategy	1 <sup>st</sup>	3.40	0.86	3.50	0.90	3.45	0.88	Agree
2	Settlement conference is	2nd	3.15	0.82	3.10	0.80	3.13	0.84	Agree

3	the most effective strategy. Reconciliation process is the most effective strategy.	2.90	0.62	3.00	0.78	2.95	0.70	Agree
4	Collective Bargaining is the most effective strategy.	2.65	0.55	2.80	0.60	2.73	0.58	Agree
5	Democratic process is the most effective strategy.	2.60	0.50	2.75	0.58	2.68	0.54	Agree

Table 2 above indicates a mean score of 3.45, 3.13, 2.95, 2.73 and 2.68.

This further means that item 1 (Negotiation with highest score is the most effective by the rating of SSSP and JSSP. The ranking followed the order of listing respectively.

**Table 3:** t-test Analysis of Mean Responses of SSSP and JSSP on Conflict Management Strategies for Improving Secondary School Administrative

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	decision
SSSP	274	2.45	0.42				
JSSP	226	2.50	0.45	0.34	0.94	1.46	Accepted

From table 3 above the t-cal of 0.94 is less than the t-crit at 0.34 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted meaning there is no significant difference in the mean rating of SSSP and JSSP on conflict management strategies for improving secondary school administration.

## **Discussion**

The study investigated conflict management strategies for improving secondary school administration in Imo state. The first research question was on the identification of some effective strategies for conflict management in secondary school administration and the result obtained revealed the weighted mean of 2.45 and 2.50 respectively for the SSSP and JSSP. It further shows that the SSSP and JSSP agree that only five of the strategies (items 1,5,9,2 and 3) with mean scores of 2.85, 2.70, 2.70, 2.60 and 2.55 are effective for conflict management in secondary school administration while the other items 4, 6,7, 8 and 10 were not agreed upon as effective strategies given the fact that they scored below the 2.5 mean benchmark. This finding gained the support of many authors like Ibeziem (2016), Amaechi (2015), Obizue and Ahukanna (2017), who posed that effective management of secondary school is largely dependent on the cordiality and cooperation among the various stakeholders, which must be prompted by effective conflict management strategies by the school administrator. According to the result, collective bargaining, reconciliation, negotiation, settlement conferences and democratic process are the effective strategies for resolving or managing conflict by secondary school administrators.

The findings in research question two which sought to determine the most effective conflict management strategy in secondary school administration indicated that negotiation is the most effective conflict management strategy in secondary school administration having recorded the highest mean score of 3.45 as averaged from the mean responses of the SSSP and JSSP as in tables 2. This finding is validated by the assertion of Nwaike (2015), that because of individual differences in human beings, negotiation gives room for the parties involved in conflict to express their grievances and suggest the way to resolve the conflict.

Similarly, the null hypothesis which was tested by the t-test statistical tool did not reflect any significant difference in the mean rating of the SSSP and JSSP on conflict management strategies for improving secondary school administration hence it was accepted as the study concluded that in secondary school administration, many strategies could be adopted towards managing conflicts but it is also important to identify and apply the most effective ones such that conflicts would be adequately managed and as well reduced.

## **Conclusion**

Conflict management is an important aspect of school administration that must be tactically handled of educational objectives must be achieved. The implication of the study hangs on ensuring a conducive atmosphere for

teaching and learning. If the principals are effective in handling conflicts and disputes among the learners, teachers and community, there will be a free and serene environment for teaching and learning.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Secondary School principals should be trained by the relevant authorities on effective conflict management strategies for better service delivery.
2. Principals should continue to adopt negotiation, settlement conference, reconciliation process, collective bargaining and democratic process as conflict management strategies in solving conflicts problems in school administration for better result

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