APPRAISAL OF PRINCIPALS' CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE.

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Abstract
This study investigated the extent of effectiveness of conflict management strategies used by secondary school principals' in Anambra State. It adopted a descriptive survey design. One research question guided the study. The population of the study comprised 106 principals and 2669 teachers in Onitsha, Aguata and Otuocha education zones. An instrument constructed by the researcher, titled: "Appraisal of Principals' Conflict Management Strategy Questionnaires" (APCMSQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts, two experts from Educational Management Unit and one expert from measurement and evaluation unit, all from Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam. The reliability was established using a test-re-test method, it yielded 0.74 correlations, coefficient using Cronbach Alpha method. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The result of data analysis revealed that strategies like forcing, avoidance and silence are used by secondary school principals' in managing conflict and that they are ineffective. Based on these findings, some recommendations were made which include: government organizing periodic seminars, conferences and workshops and principals improving their communication skills to enable them provide feedback as at when due.

Keywords: Appraisal; Conflict Management; Strategy; Conflict; effectiveness.

Introduction
Conflict is inevitable in every organization. This was stated by Flippo in Akinwonmi, (2005), that a total absence of conflict in any organization would be unbelievable, impossible, undesirable and boring and a strong indicator that such conflict is suppressed. Conflict has its advantages and disadvantages in organizations including educational institutions. Ajai (2017) opined that conflict is neither good nor bad because it helps to raise and address problems, energizes work to be on the most appropriate issues, motivates people to participate in school activities and also helps people learn how to recognise and benefit from their differences. Therefore, conflict can be destructive or constructive in an organization.

Nyamajiwa (2000) stated that conflict is the opposition of individuals or groups interest, opinions or purpose. Stones in Akinlaiya (2001) defined conflict as disagreement between two or more organizational members or groups arising from the fact that they must share

scarce resources or work activities and or form the fact that they have different status, goals, values or perception. Wall and Calister (2003) defined conflict as a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negative affected by another party. In essence, conflict is a state of disharmony, discord, discontent and kind of disagreement, dispute or opposition between individual or amongst people in an organization or group. There are two different types of conflict, which are, cognitive and affective conflict. Cognitive conflict is the kind of conflict that arises over issues, process, principles or ideas while affective conflict is conflict over values, individuals and emotions. The major conflict that arises in educational organization is affective conflict. This is where the school administrator falls into disagreement with the teachers, staff, parents, students or the community and even amongst teachers, staff and students. In this kind of situation it is the duty of the principal to manage conflict effectively, in order, not to escalate.

In the school system, a lot of things can cause conflict like, poor communication, method of staff promotion, school environment, values, beliefs and attitudes, difference of people, inadequate tools and equipments, sharing of limited resources, difference in performance criteria, favouritism by principal, embezzlement of fund, reward system, subjective performance appraisal of teachers, limited training opportunities and breaches in following internal school rules. Ejiogu (1990) enumerated sources of conflict in schools as generational gap, reality distortion, authoritarian rule, anti-authority and organizational structure factor. When conflict arises, the principal of the school has to control it and put it under check, in doing this, he is trying to manage conflict, because conflict can only be managed and cannot be removed entirely from an organization.

Management is a social process which is designed to ensure the cooperation, participation, intervention and involvement of others in the effective achievement of a given or predetermined objective (UNESCO in Ogunu, 2000). Management is a process of organizing, planning, directing and utilization of human and material resources in an organization in order to achieve the organizational goals. The effectiveness of the school principal depends on how he or she manages conflict in the school. Conflict management is the ability to deal with every situation that involves personal interactions and involving differences of opinions, Casey and Casey (1997). Conflict management is a situation where the excesses of conflict are avoided and mitigated. It can simply mean, checkmating of conflict so that it does not intensify. Conflict managed well in secondary schools, brings a lot of progress, positive change and high performance in school, but when it is not well managed, it disrupts well ordered effects towards coordinating activities that leads towards goal achievement.

Secondary education being an education a child attains after primary education and before tertiary education is an important stage in education that needs to be well managed for effective result (Ohamobi at al 2024). A student that attends a school that experiences conflict most of the time, tends to see conflict as a normal phenomeno, thereby having in him or herself that conflict is acceptable anytime. This affects the students educational background and he or she finds it difficult to adjust in the society. Therefore, secondary school principals should always try to see that their schools experience less conflict by adopting effective conflict strategies so as to achieve the goals of secondary education and help their students perform better both in school and outside school.

Conflict strategy is the method, process or established procedure for settling conflict. Unmanaged conflict has negative influence on the academic performance of students, staff productivity, management of the school and the general aspect of the school. Therefore, the school principal should adopt good conflict strategies towards managing conflicts for better school climate and positive performance of both teachers and students. There are numerous conflict strategies that can be adopted by the school principal, which are deliberation, compromising, not involving parties in conflict resolution, forcing, withdrawal, silence or neglect, avoiding, collaboration taking quick or hasty decisions, dominating and confrontation. The school principal can use either one of the strategies or more than one strategy in settling conflict. For the principal to manage conflict effectively, he must use a suitable conflict, strategy that will have positive effect. Studies like Olaileye and Arugundede (2013) asserted that different conflict management strategies may lead to either desirable or undesirable outcomes depending on their effectiveness and ineffectiveness. It is on this background that this study attempts to assess the effectiveness of strategies used by school principals in managing conflict in Anambra State Public Secondary Schools.

Statement of Problems

A lot of factors cause conflict in secondary schools factors like misunderstanding between the school principal and staff, principal and students, principal and parents, poor communication network by the principal, favoritism by the principal and mismanagement of school fund. This most times leads to incessant conflict which disrupts the effective teaching and learning in the school. Observation as shown that there are cases of conflict in secondary school management in Anambra State, especially, conflict between the principals and teachers, teacher and student, teacher to teacher, student to student, teacher and parents, principal and community. This negates the conducive school environment for effective academic performance since such teachers, most times refuse to abide by the principal's rules and regulations. It seems that most often, it leads to open fight between the principal and the teacher, climate deterioration in prompt transfer of teachers, competition amongst teachers, de-motivation of staff, lack of interest for school issues and unfriendly atmosphere. This kind of situation does not allow proper training and upbringing of discipline students', it therefore affects the training of the students in the school.

Most principals at all times try to manage these conflicts by adopting different strategies in their schools, but, the questions is – How effective are those conflict management strategies used by school principals in Anambra State.

Purpose of Study

The main purpose of this study is to appraise the effectiveness of conflict management strategies of public primary school principals, the study sought to:

(1)   Assess the effectiveness of conflict management procedure of public primary school principals in Anambra State.

Research Question

The following research question was formulated to guide the study.

1.   To what extent are conflict management strategies used by Anambra State Secondary School Principals effective?

Hypothesis
The following null hypothesis was tested to guide the study at P <.05 level of significance.
Ho1 – There is no significance difference between the mean rating of principals and teachers with regards to the extent of effectiveness of conflict management strategies use by principals' of Anambra State Public Secondary School Principals.

Methodology
The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Ali (2006) defined descriptive design as documenting or description of event in its natural phenomena without any manipulation of what is being observed. This design is considered appropriate for this study because it elicits information direct from the respondents. The area of the study was Anambra State which is made up of six education zones, namely, Onitsha, Aguata, Awka, Nnewi, Otuocha and Ogidi education zones. Out of the six education zones, three education zones which are Onitsha, Aguata and Otuocha zone were randomly selected for the study.
The population of the study comprised all the principals and teachers in Onitsha, Aguata and Otuocha education zones. Data from Department of Planning, Research and Statistics (PPSSC), Awka (2019) shows that there are 106 principals' and 2669 teachers in the three education zones. Onitsha education zone is made up of 32 principals and 1,307 teachers, Aguata education zone is made up of 48 principals and 897 teachers, while Otuocha education zone is made up of 26 principal and 465 teachers. 10 principals were randomly selected from each education zone, making it 30 principals and same simple random sampling technique was used to select 226 teachers from each education zone, making a total of 678 teachers. The sample size was 708 respondents.

The instrument used for data collection was a self structural questionnaire titled "Appraisal of Principals Conflict Management Strategy Questionnaire", (APCMSQ). The instrument has two sections, section A and B. Section A seeks information on the personal data of the respondents while, section B contains information on the respondent's response on the effectiveness of conflict – management strategy of secondary school principals. The response option of Very High Extent (VHE) = 4 points, High Extent (HE) = 3 points, Low Extent (LE) = 2 points and Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1 point were used.
In order to ensure the validity of the instrument, it was validated by three experts, two experts from educational management unit and one expert from measurement and evaluation unit, all from faculty of education in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam. Their corrections were used to modify the instrument. To determine the reliability of the instrument, 20 copies of the instrument was administered to 5 principals and 15 teachers in secondary schools in Enugu State. The responses of the respondents were collected and subjected to the measure of internal consistency using Cronbach Alpha method, and it yielded reliability index of 0.74. This high figure is an indication of high reliability of the instrument.
The instrument was administered to the respondents with the help of 6 research assistants trained by the researcher, two research assistants for each education zone. The research assistants were trained on the modalities of questionnaire administration in all the sample schools. 702 questionnaires, 30 questionnaire from principals and 672 from teachers were collected back thus making a 99% return rate. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer question, while Z – test was used to test the null hypothesis at .05 level of

significance. Criterion mean of 2.5 and above was accepted as indication of agree, while mean score below the criterion mean was indicator of disagree.

RESULT

Table 1: Mean rating and standard deviation scores on the effectiveness of conflict management strategies of principals in Anambra State Secondary Schools.

S/N	ITEMS	X	SD
1.	Dominating and not involving parties in conflict resolution strategy	1.81	0.86
2.	Withdrawal strategy	1.41	0.52
3.	Silence and Neglect strategy	1.98	0.96
4.	Forcing strategy	1.67	0.73
5.	Avoiding strategy	2.10	0.92
6.	Taking quick or hasty decisions strategy	1.47	0.57
7	Deliberation and compromising strategy	2.50	1.02
8	Not giving room for private discussion with the parties strategy	1.67	0.77
	Grand Mean	**1.82**	**0.87**

The data on table 1 show that the respondents affirmed to a low extent on items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8 that the strategies used by secondary school principals in Anambra State in managing conflicts are not effective. These items, dominating, withdrawal, silence, forcing, avoiding, taking quick decision and not giving room for private discussion with the parties are below the cutoff point 2.50. Item no 7, deliberation and compromising has weighted mean rating 2.50, meaning the respondents agreed that item 7 is effective in managing conflict in Secondary Schools. The table further showed that a grand mean of 1.82 was obtained, indicating that most of the strategies use by secondary school principals are not effective.

Hypothesis
Ho1 - There is no significant different between the mean perception scores of principals and teachers with regards to the extent of effectiveness of conflict management strategies use by Anambra State Secondary School Principals.

Table 2: Z- test results of principals and teachers on the extent of effectiveness of conflict management strategies used by principals in Anambra State Secondary School

Respondents	N	X	SD	Df	Z-Cal	Z-Crit	Decision
Principals	30	1.90	0.89				
				700	1.01	1.96	Accepted
Teachers	672	1.74	0.94				

The table 2 above shows that Z-value is 1.01 and the critical value of Z was 1.96. Since the calculated value of Z was less than the critical value of Z, the null hypothesis was accepted. This means that no significant difference exists between the mean perception scores of principals and teachers regarding the extent of effectiveness of conflict management strategies use by principals in Anambra State Secondary Schools.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from research question revealed that the strategies use by secondary school principals in managing conflict is ineffective. This was confirmed by Ajai (2017) when he stated that forcing treats the symptoms rather than the cause of the conflict and the danger in this is that the conflict can still emerge much later in a bigger form than before. To buttress this more, he noted that forcing style most often amounts to an assertive and incorporative behavior which reflects a win-lose approach to interpersonal conflict resolution. In the same vein, Imbabekhai (2001), asserted that avoidance strategy is sweeping the conflict under the rug and pretending that the issue does not exist. These strategies does not help in managing conflict, therefore the school administrators should have proper understanding of issues that cause conflict and try to handle them effectively. The result from the null hypothesis tested at 0.05 level of significance difference between the mean perceptions scores of principals and teachers regarding the extent of effectiveness of conflict management strategies use by principals in Anambra State Secondary Schools. This was in agreement with Ignace (2014) who identified the ineffectiveness of withdrawing and forcing and stated that only withdrawing most times fail to solve the problem while forcing demoralizes teachers working motivation. This in totality indicates that conflict management strategies use by secondary principals are not effective, in essence, they need to change their conflict management styles in order to have effective school management.

Conclusion

Conflict in schools need to be managed well as it cannot be eradicated completely. This made the school principals to adopt different strategies in managing it. From the findings of this study, it was indicated that most of the strategies use by principals are not effective, therefore, they need to change their strategies for a good outcome.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made.

1.   Government to organize periodic seminars, conferences and workshops on conflict management and resolution skills for both principals and teachers.
2.   Guidance and counseling department should be well equipped so as to educate students on the best way of dealing with conflict.
3.   Teachers should cooperate with the principals by keeping to their rules and regulations.
4.   Principals to improve their communication skills, this will enable principals provide feedback as at when due

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