Conflict Management Strategies among Secondary Schools Principals in Rivers State

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Abstract

The study examined conflict management strategies among secondary schools principals in Rivers State.The descriptive survey design was used. A total of 257 principals in the 257 secondary schools in the 23 local government areas of Rivers State constituted the population. A sample size of 180 principals drawn through the simple random sampling (use of slips of paper) technique was used. A structured instrument named "Principals Conflict management Strategies Questionnaire" (PCMSQ) designed in 4 point rating scale format was used for data collection. Test-retest method was used for the reliability test, which yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.84. Percentage was employed in the analysis of research questions while t-test was used to test the hypotheses. Findings revealed that the strategies principals adopt in the management of students' crisis include win-lose, avoidance, confrontation and the use of force. Based on the findings, discussions were made and conclusions drawn; recommendations made amongst others are: there should be enlightenment programmes in the form of seminars and workshops organized for principals in Rivers State to address the relevance of adopting students' conflict management strategies that do not elicit hostility and resentment among the students; and the Principal's competence in the management of student conflict should not be based on geographical location of school as this variable has no influence on the choice of strategies for managing student conflict.

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INTRODUCTION

An educational institution is a heterogeneous assembly of youths and adults from different family, cultural, religious, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. The management of a school like any human organization is more complex than the management of business due to the tendency of the "managed" to accept or resist a managerial process.

In order to achieve the goals and objectives of secondary education in Nigeria, its superintendent and management have been vested on the principal. The principal is recognized as an administrative, instructional, human relations and public relations manager. He is expected to exhibit some leadership traits which will make for the cordial and stable relationships in the school in order to achieve the co-operation of all in working towards the achievement of the goals (Ezeinwo, 1995).

Sociologists and Educationists hold various views on school conflict phenomena. Menton (2012) observed that school conflicts erupt as an adaptive response when the management system of an institution becomes a barrier to the attainment of satisfaction of the expected legitimate goals of the establishment. Shoham (1986), saw students as infants whose need for food, shelter and recognition cannot be compromised, and the tasks of meeting these needs invariably creates a conflict that is capable of disrupting harmonious social interaction between them and the school authority.

In the Nigerian school system, conflicts occur from time to time. It is the art of coming into collision or be in opposition with another. It is the tension that is experienced when a group of people feels that their needs or desire are likely to be denied (Canavan & Monahan, 2011). Conflict as a phenomenon can be expressed in behaviour. Peacefully, it could take the form of boycott of lecturers, peaceful procession with placards, hunger strikes etc. Violent students' protest takes the forms of rampage, obstructing free flow of traffic and destruction of properties (Ezeinwo, 1995).

Management on the other hand according to Nwachukwu (2010), is the guidance or direction of people towards organizational goals and objectives. It can also be seen as the supervising, controlling and co-ordinating of activity to attain optimum results with organizational resources. Thus, management of student conflicts may be said to refer to the handling and control of student conflict. According to Odigba (2007), conflict management strategies can be grouped into three major headings: Avoidance/denial; Confrontation/fighting; and problem solving. Under avoidance/denial, school administrators may decide to avoid the other parties to the issue or generally pretend that the issues do not exist even though feelings may have been hurt. Confrontation/fighting most often than not ends in violence and creates a situation where most if not all parties become losers one way or the other. In confrontation, there is a tendency of one party dominating or behaving in an abusive or arrogant manner especially if it presumes itself stronger. The problem solving approach is conciliatory in nature as it takes into consideration the needs fears and concerns of those involved while attempting to harmonize them. Here parties listen to themselves with intent to understanding the underlying elements in the conflict while resolving the issues. In this approach, there is a show of respect for differences and the need to find a common ground. However, every conflict situation has its peculiarities and circumstances, the solution to which would largely depend on how it is perceived by all concerned.

Statement of the Problem

There is a general observation by education stakeholders that secondary school administration in Rivers State has been adversely affected by the inability of school principals to manage conflicts when they manifest. This manifested in government secondary school Onne, which was shut down as a result of disruptive behaviour of some students against newly sworn in prefects who were discharging their functions. This development led to the transfer of the school Principal and some members of the teaching staff (The Tide, November 16, 2014). Furthermore, students also engage in disruptive behaviour as a result of poor feeding, inadequate accommodation, strict examination regulation, inter-sex interaction restrictions and allegations of promiscuous relationship between teachers and female students. These disruptive behaviours, which include destruction of school property, fighting, disobeying school rules and regulations need to be effectively managed by the school principals in order to achieve the aims and objectives of secondary school education.

Abdul-Raheem (2014), observed that most researchers in educational management so far, contend with identifying causes of conflict without identifying the manner in which principals can manage conflicts. He therefore stated that principals can conflicts using strategies such as win-lose, third party conference and joint problem solving among others.

Purpose of the Study

The fundamental purpose of this study is to find out the principals' conflict management strategies in secondary schools in Rivers State. Specifically, the aim of this study is to:

- Determine what strategies principals utilize in managing conflict in secondary schools.
- Find out how strategies utilized by male and female principals differ in managing conflicts in secondary schools.
- Identify how strategies utilized by principals in urban and rural areas differ in the management of students' conflict in secondary schools.
- Suggest effective strategies for principals in managing conflict in secondary schools.

Research Questions

Three basic questions were posed:

- What conflict management strategies do principals in secondary schools in Rivers State adopt?
- How do male and female principals' strategies differ in the management of students' conflict in Rivers State?
- How do principals in urban and rural schools strategies differ in the management of students' conflict in Rivers state?

Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were formulated for this study:

- HO$_1$: There is no significant difference between the strategies utilized by male and female principals in the management of students' conflict.
- HO$_2$: There is no significant difference between the strategies utilized by principals in urban and rural schools in the management of students' conflict.

METHOD

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was made up of 257 principals in the 257 secondary schools in the 23 local government areas of Rivers State. Using alphabetical order, numbers were assigned to suit the 257 secondary schools in Rivers State on a piece of paper using the names of their location. The papers were folded and mixed up in a large container. The researcher, using simple random sampling picked 180 papers which represented the sample size. That constituted 70% of the study population. A structured instrument titled "Principals Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire" (PCMSQ) was used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire adopted a modified four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA=4 points); Agree (A=3 points); Disagree (D=2points) and Strongly Disagree (SD= 1 point). Test- retest method was used for the reliability test, which yielded reliability coefficient of 0.84.The researcher distributed 180 copies of the questionnaire to the respondents, with accompanying letters of appeal. In all, 180 copies of the instrument sent out were retrieved, which amounts to 100 percent return rate. The decision rule is that where the calculated mean is less than the criterion mean (2.50), the responses were not accepted, but where the calculated mean is equal or greater than the criterion mean, it was accepted. Mean statistic was used to analyze research questions while t-test was used to test hypotheses.

RESULTS

The results obtained from the respondents are shown below:

Research Question 1: What conflict management strategies do principals in Rivers State use?

Table 1: Strategies adopted by principals in managing conflict

S/N	Statement	Mean responses of Principals	Remark
1.	The use of force by principals to compel students to concede to their own point of view is a good strategy to manage conflicts in secondary schools	2.24	Not Accepted
2.	Use of force by principals will lead to permanent resolution of conflict in secondary schools	2.35	Not Accepted
3.	Use of force by principals will not bring permanent resolution of conflict in secondary school	2.84	Accepted
4.	Joint problem solving strategy, which involves principals and students identifying and solving problems together is ideal for managing conflicts in secondary schools	2.14	Not Accepted
5.	Joint problem solving strategy will assist principals resolve conflict permanently in secondary schools.	2.18	Not Accepted
6.	Joint problem solving strategy will not bring permanent resolution of crisis	2.92	Accepted
7.	Third party conference strategy where a third party mediates in conflict situation should be adopted by principals to manage secondary school conflict.	2.26	Not Accepted

S/N	Statement	Mean responses of Principals	Remark
8.	Third party conference strategy will not bring about permanent solution to secondary school conflict	2.18	Not Accepted
9.	Third party conference strategy will not bring permanent resolution of conflict	2.84	Accepted
10.	Using confrontation strategy by principals to manage conflict in secondary school is ideal	2.24	Not Accepted
11.	Confrontation strategy used by principals of secondary school will lead to permanent resolution of conflict	2.20	Not Accepted
12.	The use of confrontation as a strategy to manage conflict in secondary schools by principals will not bring permanent resolution of conflict	3.12	Accepted
13.	Win- lose strategy where the goals and needs of the principals are satisfied is used by principals to manage conflict in secondary schools.	3.40	Accepted
14.	Win- lose strategy by secondary school principals will result in permanent conflict resolution	3.24	Accepted
15.	Win- Lose strategy as used by Principals of secondary schools will not result in permanent resolution of conflict.	2.14	Not Accepted
16.	To manage conflict in secondary schools, principals use the avoidance strategy- where the other parties to the issue are avoided.	2.10	Not Accepted
17.	The use of avoidance strategy by secondary school principals to manage conflict will bring permanent resolution.	2.20	Not Accepted
18	Avoidance strategy as conflict management strategy will not bring about permanent resolution.	3.20	Accepted

Key: Mean ≥ 2.5 is accepted or positive

Mean < 2.5 is not accepted or negative

Analysis in table 1 shows that secondary school principals in Rivers State prefer the win- lose strategy to other strategies like avoidance, confrontation, force, third party and joint problem solving in managing student conflict. This is because their mean response to item thirteen in the questionnaire is above 2.5, which is accepted or positive, while their mean responses on other conflict management strategies were below 2.5.

Research Question 2: How do male and female Principals' strategies differ in the management of student conflict in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean of male and female principals' opinion on the management of students conflict

		Male Principals		Female Principals	
S/N	Statement(Sex as a Variable)	Mean Responses	Remark	Mean Responses	Remark
1.	The sex of Principals also determines the use of conflict management Strategies in secondary Schools	2.24	Not Accepted	2.26	Not accepted
2.	Sex of Principals has nothing to do with the use of conflict management strategies	3.28	Accepted	3.26	Accepted

	in secondary schools				
3.	Male and Female Principals adopt the same conflict management strategies in secondary schools.	3.12	Accepted	3.18	Accepted

Analysis in table 2 shows that the mean responses of male and female principals on strategies adopted in managing student conflict are the same accepted. This means that both male and female principals adopt the same strategies. Therefore in providing answer to research question two, male and female principals do not differ in strategies adopted in managing student conflict in secondary schools in Rivers state.

Research Question 3: How do Strategies adopted by Principals in urban and rural schools differ in managing students conflicts?

Table 3: Mean of urban and rural principals' opinion on strategies adopted in managing students conflict

		Urban Principals		Rural Principals	
S/N	Statement	Mean Response	Remark	Mean Response	Remark
1.	School location determines the choice of strategies for managing conflict	2.20	Not Accepted	2.15	Not Accepted
2.	Principals in urban and rural schools apply different strategies in managing conflict	2.10	Not Accepted	2.13	Not Accepted
3.	Urban and rural school principals adopt the same conflict management strategies	3.20	Accepted	3.24	Accepted

Source: Research Data 2018.

Analysis in table 3 shows that the mean responses of urban and rural principals on strategies adopted in managing conflict are the same, indicating that the strategies of urban and rural principals do not differ. Therefore, in providing answer to research question three, the strategies of urban and rural principals do not differ in managing student conflict.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the strategies utilized by male and female principals in the management of student conflict.

Table 4: t- test on the difference between strategies adopted by male and female principals in managing students' conflict

Variable	Sample size	Mean	SD	t- value calculated	t- critical Value	Level of Significance	Remark
Male Principals	125	29.8	7.44	0.76	1.96	0.05	Accepted
Female Principals	55	12.3	5.25				

DF = 125+ 55 − 2=178 (df =n_1+n_2 -2)

Analysis in table 4 shows that the t- calculated value of 0.76 is less than t-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. We, therefore accept at 0.05 level of significance the null hypothesis, which states that, there is no significant difference between the strategies adopted by male and female principals in the management of student conflict.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the strategies adopted by principals in urban and rural schools in the management of student's conflict.

Table 5: t-test on the difference between strategies adopted by principals in urban and rural schools in the management of students conflict

Variable	Sample Size	Mean	SD	t-value calculated	t- critical value	Level of Significance	Remark
Principals in Urban Schools	85	19.6	5.19	0.56	1.96	0.05	Accepted
Principals in Rural Schools	95	31.3	6.85				

DF= 85+95-2=178 (df=n_1+n_2 -2)

Analysis in table 5 shows that the t-calculated value of 0.56 is less than the t- critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. We, therefore accept at 0.05 level of significance the null hypothesis, which states that, there is no significant difference between the strategies adopted by principals in urban and rural schools in the management of students' conflict. It is therefore concluded that geographical location of schools has no effect on the use of conflict management strategies.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Discussion in this study is done according to findings of the study. Findings from table 1 show that the strategy principals in Rivers State secondary schools adopt in managing conflict in their schools is the win- lose. This result is in agreement with the work of Nwachukwu (2010), who observed that secondary school principals in Abia state rated Win- Lose as a major technique for the management of students' conflict. However, Odigba (2007) noted that the Win- Lose strategy imposes solutions and results in the test of "will" in which only the winners' goals and desires are satisfied. Thus, the school principal in applying this strategy does not seek the co-operation of the students.

Also the principals' response to the items relating to research question two, indicate that male and female principals do not differ in respect of strategies adopted in the management of students conflict. This means that both male and female principals when faced with conflict situation will adopt the same strategies. A possible explanation to this result is that management skills cut across gender. This finding is in line with the work of Melvin (2014), which revealed that the conflict management strategies of adult leaders are the same.

Findings from research question three which is in table three revealed that principals in urban and rural schools do not differ as regards strategies they adopt in the management of students conflict. This means that principals in urban and rural schools will manage conflict situation the same way. This result is in agreement with the views of Uche (2013), who posited that principals' perception of conflict situation is the same, the location of the conflict notwithstanding. He further opined that a peaceful resolution of conflict should be the concern of all stake holders in the education industry.

Result obtained as shown in table four showed that there is no significant difference between strategies adopted by male and female principals in managing conflict. This is because the t-calculated value of 0.76 is less than the t- critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. According to Okpara (2012), difference in the pattern of behaviour between boys and girls has

been the subject of extensive study. He further opined that from infancy, girls are treated differently from boys. This is further supported by the views of Onwurah (2014), who contended that while parents encourage their girls to be passive, cautious, dependent and ready to help, they want their boys to be independent and show initiative. He went further to say that parents reward these qualities accordingly. It seems natural then that at the school learning age, many girls should have fully assumed the role of the "weaker partner" achieving desired aims not through a display of strength or authority. Indeed, these differences were not displayed in the management of student conflict as both male and female principals did not differ in respect of strategies for managing conflict.

Result obtained by testing hypothesis two as shown in table five shows that there is no significant difference between strategies adopted by principals in urban and rural schools in managing conflict. This is because the t-calculated value of 0.56 is less than the t-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis two is therefore accepted. This result agrees with the findings of Mgbodile (2014) who opines that principals' competence in the management of students conflict should not be based on geographical location of school as this variable has no influence on the choice of strategies for managing conflict.

CONCLUSION

Every student's conflict management/resolution considerably influences internal workings of the school. This is because it leads to disruption of patterned and laid out activities which are best achieved by co-ordination. From the study it can be concluded that Win-Lose strategy is mostly used by principals in Rivers State owned secondary schools in the management of conflict; that principals whether in urban and rural school utilize the same strategies in managing students conflict and that male and female principals manage conflict situation applying the same strategy.

Recommendations

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

- Enlightenment programme in the form of seminars and workshops should be organized for principals in Rivers State to address the importance of adopting students' conflict management strategies that do not elicit hostility and resentment among the students.
- Principals' competence in the management of students conflict should not be based on geographical location of school as this variable has no influence on the choice of strategies for managing students' conflict.
- Gender of a school principal should not be taken into consideration by the Rivers State senior Secondary schools Board in redeployment of principals to conflict prone secondary schools as this variable has no influence on the choice of strategies for managing students conflict.
- School principals should adopt win-lose strategy in addressing issue of conflict in secondary schools.

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