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A PRINCIPALS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ADAMAWA STATE

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Abstract

The need for principals to be able to manage conflict effectively in secondary schools necessitated this study. The study is to assess the extent the principals in secondary schools in Adamawa State utilize conflict management strategies in their school administration. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive survey research design was adopted and 385 principals were studied without sampling. A five point rating scale questionnaire containing 18items was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts. Test-retest method was used to establish the reliability of the instrument. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used for the analysis and the clusters yielded coefficients of 0.76 and 0.82, with an overall coefficient of 0.84. Three hundred and sixty duly completed copies of the instrument were retrieved and used for data analysis. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions and to determine the homogeneity of the respondents' ratings while the z- test was used to test the hypotheses. Findings revealed that secondary school principals in Adamawa State utilized competitive strategy to a great extent while collaboration strategy was used to a moderate extent. Gender did not influence the respondents' choice of adopting competitive strategies in resolving conflicts while there was a significant difference in the mean ratings of principals in urban and rural secondary schools on the use of collaboration as a conflict management strategy. Based on the findings, it was concluded that secondary school principals in Adamawa State were using appropriate strategies in resolving conflicts. It was therefore recommended among others that institutions and government should train teachers in conflict resolution strategies before appointing them as principals.

Key words: Strategies, Conflict management Strategies, Principals

Introduction

Secondary education comes midway between primary and tertiary education. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) described secondary education as the education which students receive after primary education and before tertiary education. The aims of secondary education include preparation for useful living within the society and preparation for higher education. It is expected of secondary education to build on the basic literacy and functional knowledge acquired at the primary level and give students the opportunity to

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acquire more advanced and specialized knowledge and skills required for further education, labour market and meaningful living. In pursuance of these aims/goals, school authorities are confronted with a lot of managerial challenges prominent among which is presence of conflict.

Conflict has to do with disagreement, struggle or contest between people with opposing needs and ideas. People's beliefs, values and interests are likely to clash with those of others in the course of human events because of diversity in personality types (Njoku, 2004). From all indications, conflict is inevitable in every human organization including the school system as a result of individual and group differences. Conflict can occur in form of insult, name calling, defamation of character, marginalization and violent destruction among others. In the secondary school system, conflict can occur between the students and the school authority, between the teachers and the students, between the principals and the staff and even between the school and the community.

The way a principal of a school perceives a particular situation may differ from the perception of a classroom teacher. This might lead to marginalization by the principal. Students who feel that their needs are not met might express this through demonstration. Furthermore, communities who feel that their expectations from the school environment are not met are likely to fall out with the school authority.

Conflicts in secondary schools could be attributed to lack of effective communication network, non-conducive atmosphere or work environment among others (Njoku, 2004). Lack of participatory decision making and egocentrism on the part of the principal equally contribute to conflict. When the above conditions prevail in a school without effective management, the resultant effect is manifested in loitering about, fighting with dangerous weapons, sexual abuses, bullying of younger students by their seniors among others. Teachers abandon their classes and engage in unnecessary discussions, form cliques against the principal and lack dedication and commitment to duty (Adamawa State Ministry of Education, 2015).

Morgan (2012) observed that gender differences in conflict management are the most studied topics in the field of conflict management. Are there inherent differences in the way men and women resolve conflicts, if so, are these differences linked to gender? This question has drawn attention because researchers have been trying to provide an explanation about why there have been so few women leaders especially in Adamawa State. Morgan further noted that most researches on gender difference have focused upon whether women's comparative lack of success in attaining high positions could somehow be related to their difference in conflict management. Similarly, Ogundiran (2008) noted that location of schools could have a great influence on the principals' performance and their conflict management strategies, which is a function of principals' leadership efficiency. The prevalence of conflict and its traumatic effects on school life cannot be ignored or wished away. The secondary school system requires adequate conflict management strategies to

arrest ugly events that emanate from conflict situations.

According to Tosi, Rizzo, and Carroll (2010), conflict management strategies include: competition, collaboration, avoidance and compromise. Competition involves individuals putting their own interests before anyone else's interest. Collaboration is a strategy where people collectively seek for a common solution to a problem, while avoidance is a method of conflict management which simply means to withdraw. Compromise is seen as a give and take proposition where parties concerned do not struggle with problems to the fullest. Ezegbe (2005) and Obi (2004) highlighted the use of competition, and collaboration as effective conflict management strategies. Supporting their views, McPheat (2012) pointed out the use of competition and collaboration. These strategies can only be effectively utilized by principals well grounded in the knowledge of educational administration. This study is therefore carried out to assess the conflict management strategies of principals in secondary schools in Adamawa State.

Statement of the Problem

Experts in the field of education have expressed concern on the declining trend in the administration of public secondary school (McPheat, 2012). This decline has been blamed on lack of participative decision making, lack of communication, poor team spirit, unconducive working environment, administrative incompetence and conflict mismanagement. Of all the several factors that have been found to account for this ugly state of affairs, inability to handle conflict effectively could be attributed to be the most critical.

Evidence abound on cases of staff falling out with their principals, quarreling among themselves and students flouting school rules and regulations. Observations in the school system show that issues where conflict occur include lack of effective communication, non-conducive work environment, role ambiguity, teachers misusing their power and neglecting their duties. The problem of this study is that poor management of conflict in secondary schools in Adamawa State negatively affects the smooth running of the schools. Principal-teachers' relationships are smeared and the academic performance of the students is hampered. It is against this backdrop that the researcher assessed the conflict management strategies of principals in secondary schools in Adamawa State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the conflict management strategies of principals in secondary schools in Adamawa State. Specifically, this study sought to ascertain:

1. The extent to which principals in secondary schools in Adamawa State use competition as a strategy for conflict management.
2. The extent to which principals of secondary schools in Adamawa State use collaboration as a strategy for conflict management.

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Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do secondary school principals in Adamawa State use competition as a conflict management strategy?
2. To what extent do principals of secondary schools in Adamawa State use collaboration as a strategy for managing conflict?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses was tested at 0.05 level of significance

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on use of competition as a conflict management strategy in secondary schools in Adamawa State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of urban and rural secondary school principals on use of collaboration as a strategy for conflict management in secondary schools in Adamawa State.

Review Of Related Literature

Conflict: Conflict is a felt struggle between two or more interdependent individuals over perceived incompatible differences in beliefs, values, and goals, or over differences in desires (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011). McNamara (2007) defined conflict as any divergence of interests, objectives or priorities between individuals, groups or organizations or non- conformity to the requirements of a task, activities or processes. Conflict is inevitable in every human organization since people's lives, jobs, pride, self-concept, ego and sense of mission or purposes are dealt with. Conflict is natural. It is not necessarily good or bad. It is the way it is handled that makes the outcome positive or negative.

Management: Management is the act of handling or controlling issues successfully. Weihrich and Koontz (2005) defined management as the process of designing and maintaining an environment in which individuals working together in groups, efficiently accomplish selected aims. Stoner, Freeman and Gilbert (2006) referred to management as the process of planning, organizing, leading and controlling the work of the organization and members and of using all available organizational resources to reach stated organization goals.

Conflict Management: Conflict management refers to programmes that teach individuals concepts and skills for preventing, managing and peacefully resolving conflicts (Jones, 2004). According to Johannseen and Page (2006), conflict management refers to the identification of divergences of interest between groups or individuals and the constructive

reconciling and balancing of these divergences so that they are acknowledged and expressed. Robbins (2000) stipulated that conflict management entails maintaining the optimum level of conflict in a group. Too little conflict creates stagnation.

Use of Competition as a Conflict Management Strategy

Competition strategy as theorized by Thomas-Kimann (2002) means someone putting personal interest before anyone else's interest. To compete with others with positive goal to win is good; however, the journey of getting what one wants might not produce an affirmation outcome. This strategy is used by principals who are highly assertive about pursuing their own goals but uncooperative in assisting others to reach their goals. These principals attempt to resolve a conflict by controlling or persuading others in order to achieve their own ends. A competition strategy is essentially a win lose conflict strategy.

Use of Collaboration as Conflict Management Strategy

Collaboration strategy, according to Preedy, Glatter and Wise (2001) is characterized by mutual differences, but conflict is at times regarded as natural and healthy. It requires open confrontation coupled with an objective search for a common solution to the problem. People hope and expect that various conflicting viewpoints can be integrated in a new, improved viewpoint. This style may be labeled as once of co-operation and win-win because the conflict is not coloured by personal opinion, and a sincere and trace attempt is being made to find a correct and real solution (Saddler, 2002).

Method

The design for the study was a descriptive survey research. This study was carried out in all the 385 government owned secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria. The population of the study consisted of 385 principals of public secondary schools in the three education zones in Adamawa State namely: Yola (165), Mubi (130) and Numan (90) principals. (Source: Adamawa State Ministry of Education). The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Conflict Management Strategies of Principals of Secondary Schools (QCMS-PSS)” with a five point rating scale of: Very Great Extent (VGE) - 5, Great Extent (GE) - 4 Moderate Extent (ME) -3, Low Extent (LE) 2 and Very Low Extent (VLE) - 1.

The face validity of the instrument was established using the opinions of three experts in the field of Business Education and Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established using the test re-test method. The researcher administered copies of the instrument on 25 principals of public secondary schools in Taraba State. After a time frame of 14 days, the instrument was re-administered on the respondents and collected. Data from the two tests were analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient to determine the degree of reliability. The correlation coefficient of 0.78 and 0.76 were

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obtained for clusters A and B respectively with overall reliability coefficient of 0.84 for the whole sections. This was considered sufficiently high for the study.

The instrument for the study was administered by the researcher with the help of three adequately briefed research assistants (one for each education zone). Out of 385 copies of the questionnaires distributed, 360 copies were appropriately filled and returned giving a percentage return rate of 94. Mean was used to analyze data related to the research questions. The z-test statistic was used to test the two hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The results of the study are presented below;

Research Question 1:

To what extent do secondary school principals in Adamawa State use competition as a conflict management strategy**?**

Table 1:

Respondents' mean rating on the extent competition strategy are used as a conflict management strategy

N = 360

S/N	Competition Strategy	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Encourage both parties to see conflict as a win or lose issue	3.92	1.12	GE
2	Imposing personal decisions on both parties	4.02	1.01	GE
3	Expecting both parties to adhere strictly to directives given not minding the consequences	3.84	1.00	GE
4	Permitting each party to suggest satisfactory solution to the Problem	3.68	0.94	GE
5	Meting out punitive measure to any of the party who fail to adhere to directives given e	3.91	1.07	GE
6	permitting each party to attain excellent results regardless Of other parties' interests	3.36	1.05	ME
7	Permitting each group to make satisfactory suggestions to solving the problems at stake	3.98	1.06	GE
8	Encouraging high concern for others and low concern for oneself	3.49	1.12	ME
9	Permitting cross-examination by both parties involved	3.61	1.18	GE
10	Allowing collective resolution to solve controversial issues	3.21	2.24	ME
	Cluster Mean	**3.69**		**GE**

Key: Very Great Extent (VGE), Great Extent (GE), Moderate Extent (ME), Low extent (LE), Very Low Extent (VLE).

Data in Table 1 show that secondary school principals in the area of the study utilize most of the items to a great extent. The mean of means score of 3.69 show that on the whole, secondary school principals in the area of the study utilize competition strategy to a great extent. The standard deviations for all the items are within the same range showing that the respondents are not wide apart in their mean ratings.

Research Question 2

To what extent do principals of secondary schools in Adamawa State use collaboration as a strategy for managing conflict**?**

Table 2:

Respondents' mean rating on the extent collaboration are used as a conflict management strategy

N = 360

S/N	Collaboration strategy	Mean	SD	Remarks
11	Encouraging both parties involved to invest time and resources to finding a victorious solution	4.36	0.76	GE
12	Emphasizing on views or efforts to finding amicable solutions to please all parties involved	3.53	1.20	GE
13	Making both parties to see conflict as a creative opportunity	3.49	1.14	ME
14	Settling grievances by bringing up ideas that have similarities to both groups	3.19	1.26	ME
15	Exchanging accurate information with each party with a view to solving the problem together	2.89	1.24	ME
16	Permitting cross-examination by both parties involved in conflict	3.28	1.16	ME
17	Getting each party's concerns out in the open	3.21	1.24	ME
18	Putting my views and inviting each party to do the same	3.44	1.29	ME
	Cluster Mean	**3.42**		**ME**

Data in Table 2 indicate that two of the items were utilize as conflict management strategies by secondary school principals at a very great extent, while the rest were utilized to a moderate extent. The mean of means score of 3.42 show that on the whole, secondary

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school principals in the area of the study utilized collaboration strategy to manage conflict to a moderate extent. The standard deviations for all the items are within the same range showing that the respondents were not wide apart in their mean ratings.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on the use of competition as a conflict management strategy in secondary schools in Adamawa state.

Table 3:

z-test analysis of male and female respondents on the extent they utilize competition as a conflict management strategy

Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	α	df	z-cal	z-crit	Remark
Male	208	3.72	1.01					
				0.05	358	0.45	1.96	Not Significant
Female	152	3.68	0.69					

Data in Table 3 also showed that the calculated z - value of 0.45 is less than the critical z - value of 1.96 (0.45 < 1.96) at 0.05 level of significance and 358 degree of freedom. This means that the respondents did not differ significantly in their mean ratings on extent they used competition as a conflict management strategy based on gender. Therefore, the null hypothesis wasupheld.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of urban and rural secondary school principals on the use of collaboration as a s conflict management strategy in secondary schools in Adamawa State.

Table 4:

z-test analysis of urban and rural respondents on the extent they utilize collaboration as a conflict management strategy

Location of Schools	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	α	df	z-cal	z-crit	Remark
Urban	142	3.63	0.85					
				0.05	358	6.17	1.96	Significant
Rural	218	2.89	1.19					

Data in Table 4 indicated that the calculated z- value of 6.17 is greater than critical z-

value is 1.96 (6.17 > 1.96) at 0.05 significance level and 358 degree of freedom. This means that the respondents differ significantly in their mean ratings on extent they utilized collaboration as a result of school location. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not upheld.

Discussion of Results

Findings of the study revealed that principals in the area of the study utilized competition as a conflict management strategy to a great extent. This is indicated in their responses to items 6-15 with mean ratings ranging from 3.21 - 4.02 respectively. The findings of the study is in agreement with that of Wilmot and Joyce (2007) which revealed that secondary school administrators (principals) frequently used competition technique to resolve struggles by controlling or persuading teachers and students in order to achieve their ends. The authors further stated that principals usually employ this method when quick, decisive actions are needed. Also, it helps to generate creativity and enhance performance because it challenges teachers to make their best efforts. This finding supported the views of Wilmot, Joyce and Anashie (2014) to the effect that secondary school principals utilized competition technique to manage conflicts which if left unresolved can threaten the smooth functioning of the schools and trigger a chain of other educational and social problems. The social problems are abuse of office, disagreement, quarrels, hostility and violent fights. These could have negative impact on the successful running of the schools.

The study also found that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals of secondary schools on the extent they utilized competition strategy in managing conflicts. This is in agreement with the findings of Miller (2003) who held that the use of competition as a conflicts resolution strategy by secondary school administrators does not depend on the gender of the principals.

Findings of the study equally showed that principals of secondary schools in the area of study utilized collaboration as a conflict management strategy at moderate extent. This finding of the study was in accordance with the opinions of Saddler (2002) which found that educational leaders (principals in particular) moderately used this strategy because it required open confrontation coupled with an objective search for a common solution to problems. Saddler further highlighted that teachers and students normally hoped and expected that various conflicting viewpoints be integrated in a new, improved, viewpoint or aim. Supporting the view of Saddler, Miller (2003) posited that collaboration is normally used by principals as conflict resolution strategy because it enables them to merge the feelings and experiences of teachers and students from different backgrounds, perspectives and perceptions. It does help them to resolve long standing conflicts, which may have a negative effect on working relationships. It equally helps and when the staff are expected to be forthcoming with creative solutions for specific problems.

Furthermore, the finding indicated that there was a significant difference in the mean

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ratings of principals in urban and those in rural secondary schools on the extent they utilized collaboration as a conflict management strategy. This is in agreement with the findings of Akinwonmi (2005) who held that location of the schools has a significant difference on principals' selection of a particular conflict management strategy.

Conclusion

From the findings of the study, conflicts abound in every school and as long as principals, teachers and students interact, conflicts will continue to occur. However, when conflicts occur, it must be resolved. It therefore depends on the awareness and dexterity of the school principals to use appropriate strategies in resolving conflicts. The study revealed that secondary school principals in Adamawa State utilized competition strategy at great extent in resolving conflicts in their schools, while the collaboration technique was used by principals to a moderate extent in resolving conflicts. It also found that gender of the school principals do not influence their choice of competitive strategies for resolving conflicts, while secondary school principals' use of collaboration technique was influenced by the location of schools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were made:

1. School principals should be encouraged on how to continue to use appropriate strategies in solving conflicts in schools. This is because competition strategy if not effectively used could have a negative impact on performance of teachers.
2. Regular training should be organized for secondary school principals to improve the use of collaboration strategy in conflict resolution in school settings.

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