CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS AS CORRELATE OF TEACHING PARTNERSHIP IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract
The study examined conflict management skills as correlate of teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at .05 level significance. The study adopted correlational research design. The population of the study comprised 5133 teachers in 266 public secondary schools in the six Education Zones in Anambra State. A sample of 513 teachers was used for the study. Multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study. The instruments for data collection were a researcher-structured questionnaire titled: Conflict Management Skills Questionnaire (CMSQ) and Teaching Partnership Questionnaire (TPQ). The instruments were content validated while the construct validation was ascertained using Principle Component Analysis Approach. The reliability of the instruments was determined using Cronbach Alpha Coefficient method which gave coefficient values of 0.82 for effective communication skills, 0.78 for active listening skills and 0.81 for teaching partnership respectively. Simple regression analysis was used for data analysis. The study revealed that effective communication skills ($r = 0.682$; $P < 0.000$) and active listening skills ($r = 0.675$; $P < 0.000$) have positive and significant relationship with teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The study concluded that there exists relationship between conflict management skills and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Based on the findings, the study recommended among others that school administrators should tackle the issues of improper conflict management skills adopted in the school system in order to prompt good teaching partnership.

Keywords: *Conflict, Conflict Management Skills, Teaching Partnership, Public Secondary Schools*

Introduction

Education is a positive instrument for the overall improvement of one's knowledge, ideologies and skills with the aim of achieving self-reliance, sustainability and enlightenment. It is also the key for the development of one's personality and as such inculcates the right character in accordance with acceptable societal norms and values. The importance of education cannot be overemphasized given that it plays a very vital role in the provision of resources through manpower which is needed for an all-round national development (Ugochukwu et al., 2021). A well administered education would equip individuals with capacities to confront problems and changing situations; awaken intellectual curiosity, encourage the spirit of inquiry and make its recipients inventive, self-reliant and resourceful. The main policy objectives of education is to raise the quality of education at all levels in order to make the products of the system more useful to the society and to maintain education as one of the prime engines for development. However, teaching partnership is one of the determinant factors to how fast these education objectives would be achieved.

Teaching partnership is a key aspect of teachers' professional development and a vehicle to increase teachers' knowledge. It produces a cooperative environment that enhances the level of novelty and passion among teachers and provides a continuous backing for teachers' professional enhancement. Shah (2018) stated that teaching partnership create a cooperative climate that heightens the level of innovation and enthusiasm among teachers and provides a continuous support for staff professional enhancement. Good partnership among school teachers have consistently been highlighted as an important factor for school improvement and success. In the view of Gurlui (2015), teaching partnership

entails teachers' involvement with their peers at all levels, be it intellectual, moral, social and emotional for improved academic delivery in schools.

The researcher defined teaching partnership as the formal and collaborative relationship between teachers, often from different backgrounds or institutions, working together to enhance teaching and learning experiences. This partnership involves sharing resources, expertise, and strategies to improve educational outcomes for students. Onaolapo et al. (2020) noted that teaching partnership in schools lead to increased teachers' satisfaction and flexibility; breaks the seclusion of the classroom and brings career rewards and regular satisfactions for teachers. Partnership is the top priority of educational policies aimed at increasing the quality of education. Naicker (2019) itemized eleven benefits of partnership among school teachers to include; moral support, improved efficiency, enhanced effectiveness, reduced burden, harmonized time perceptions between teachers and administrators, positioned certainty of collective professional wisdom, political confidence, improved capacity for reflection, organizational responsiveness, chances to learn, and constant learning. Since the success of education is built on partnership among the teachers and other stakeholders in education, it becomes imperative that conflict among stakeholders be eliminated so as to achieve objectives of education.

In Nigeria, secondary schools are highly susceptible to conflict because of some internal or external factors. Nasiru and Hammawa (2020) observed that secondary schools in Nigeria have been bedeviled by an overt conflict which often resulted in crises like protests, demonstrations, riots and strikes, which are inimical to effective academic performance. There is no meaningful development that can take place in a crisis-ridden system, torn apart by conflicts. Adeola (2014) reiterated that the causative factors of these conflicts in secondary schools are: rumor-mongering, domineering attitude of principals, communication breakdown, resources problem and lack of opportunities for promotion. In schools, conflict can exist among staff members and leadership of the schools. Whatever be the cause, the effect of conflict is often too high if not properly managed with the right skills (Bowie et al., 2015). Conflict in the school organization is not the problem rather improper conflict management skills is the problem.

The researcher defined conflict management skills as internal mechanisms that enable individuals to get to the root of problems in order to resolve conflict in a manner that is acceptable to the conflicting parties. Reece and Brandt (2016) disclosed that conflict management skills are the skills that enable one to bypass personal differences and to open up to possibilities. Aigbedion (2019) stated that effective communication, active listening, practicing empathy, problem-solving, positive attitude and level headedness are skills suitable for conflict management in organizations. However, this study focused on these aspects of conflict management skills: effective communication skills and active listening skills.

Effective communication skills are the abilities used when giving and receiving different kinds of information. While these skills may be part of day-to-day work life, communicating in a clear, effective and efficient way is an extremely special and useful skill. According to Brandon and Steph, effective communication skills involve listening, speaking and observing. Effective communication can improve relationships at home, work and in social situations by deepening connections to others and improving teamwork, decision-making and problem-solving (McKay et al., 2019). Continuing, McKay et al. insisted that effective communication combines a set of skills including nonverbal communication, attentive listening, the ability to manage stress in the moment and the capacity to recognize and understand people's emotions and those of the person they are communicating with.

Active listening plays a crucial role in the teaching-learning process. It has to do with paying close attention to the person who is speaking. Weger at el. (2014) defined listening skills as an active, constructive process that includes activating the listener to his previously obtained knowledge that aims to help him understand the listened text. People who are active listeners are well-regarded by their coworkers because of the attention and respect they offer others (Lenhart & Duggan, 2014). While it seems simple, active listening skills can be hard to develop and improve. This form of listening conveys a mutual understanding between the speaker and the listener. Active listening as a skill is not restricted only to receiving sound and perceiving meanings, but it is also a mental effort that involves inferring

and interpreting of information. Therefore, listening is an integrated performance that requires the listener to use his sight and hearing senses and the power of the mind in following up with the speaker's speech to understand, comprehend and determine ideas (Patrick, 2019).

For partnership to thrive in the school environment, teachers have to create engaging mechanisms which imply the adoption of a teacher's attitude of involvement with the students and constant evaluations of the pedagogical practices (Agnoletto & Queiroz, 2019). Building an environment of collaboration between the agents involved (teachers and students) requires time, disposition and knowledge of different teaching methodologies and practices. If the teaching work that requires much more than the mere planning of the class are developed together, it will produce harmonious voices. It is against this background that the study sought to examine conflict management skills as correlate of teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

Schools are learning environments which need peace and silent atmosphere as intended ideals. Conflicts are inevitable hence cannot miss where people are and coexist. Some public secondary schools in Anambra State have experienced one form of conflict or the other which has not only contributed to poor collaboration among the teachers but also to the management and other stakeholders (Eke, 2023). Wherever conflicts occur in schools, the principals are held accountable and responsible for the act. The researcher observed in some public secondary schools in Anambra State, that some teachers do experience conflict situations which arise as a result of instructional disagreement, cultural diversity misunderstandings, role ambiguity, interpersonal clashes and cultural diversity misunderstandings. Despite the government efforts to curb this menace by training teachers, accepting pastoral and chaplaincy services in schools, early payment of staff salaries and training school heads in conflict management among others, partnership among teachers in schools are still in doubt as the issue of job dissatisfaction and low productivity still persist. One may begin to wonder what really could be the reason. Could it be that teachers in the State do not have appropriate conflict management skills to manage emanating conflict in schools? Could it be that they lack good communication and active listening skills to prompt effective teaching partnership? These questions and many more have prompted the researcher to examine conflict management skills as correlate of teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine conflict management skills as correlate of teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the relationship that exists between effective communication skills and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. ascertain the relationship that exists between active listening skills and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship that exists between effective communication skills and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. What is the relationship that exists between listening skills and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance:

1. Effective communication skills do not have significant relationship with teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. Active listening skills do not have significant relationship with teaching partnership in public secondary schools in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Methods

The study was a correlational research design. The study was carried out in Anambra State. The population of the study comprised 5133 teachers in 263 public secondary schools in six Education Zones in Anambra State (Planning, Research and Statistics Department, Anambra State Post Primary Schools Service Commission (PPSSC), Awka, 2022). A sample of 513 teachers (that is, 10% of the population) was used for the study. Multi-stage sampling technique involving; proportionate stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used for the study. The instruments for data collection were a researcher-structured questionnaire titled: Conflict Management Skills Questionnaire (CMSQ) and Teaching Partnership Questionnaire (TPQ). The instruments were divided into section A, B and C. Section 'A' sought demographic information of the respondents; section 'B' which has two clusters sought information on effective communication skills and active listening skills; while section 'C' sought information on teaching partnership. The instruments were on four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) (4 points), Agree (A) (3 points), Disagree (D) (2 points), and Strongly Disagree (SD) (1 point). The face and construct validity of the instrument was established by three experts; one from Measurement and Evaluation and two in Education Management. All the experts are all from the Faculty of Education, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. The questionnaire reliability was ascertained through a pilot test. The data collected were analyzed with Cronbach Alpha method and coefficient values of 0.82 for effective communication skills, 0.78 for active listening skills and 0.81 for teaching partnership. Out of 513 copies of the instrument administered, 483 (94%) of the instrument were correctly completed and returned. Simple regression analysis was used to answer the research questions and hypotheses at .05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the relationship that exists between effective communication skills and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 1: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on the Relationship that Exists Between Effective Communication Skills and Teaching Partnership in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

		Unstandardized β	Std. Dev. β	Standardized β
Constant		30.318	6.265	
Communication Skills		.758	.214	.682
R	.682			
R^2	.604			
Adj. R^2	.564			

The summary of the simple regression analysis as shown in table 1 indicated that a high positive relationship exists between **effective communication skills** and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State as shown by the regression coefficient (R = .682). The coefficient of determination (R^2) of .604 showed that the explanatory power of the variable is moderately strong. This implies that 60% of the variations in teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State are being accounted for or explained by the variations in **effective communication skills**. The adjusted R^2 supports the claim of the R^2 with a value of .564 indicating that 56% of the total variation in the dependent variable (teaching partnership) is explained by the independent variable (**effective communication skills**). Thus, adjusted R^2 supports the statement that the explanatory power of **effective communication skills** is highly strong in determining teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Again, the standardized beta weight (β = .682) showed that a positive relationship exists between **effective communication skills** and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This is an indication that increase in **effective communication skills** leads to .682 (68%) increase in teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship that exists between listening skills and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 2: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on the Relationship that Exists Between Active Listening Skills and Teaching Partnership in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

		Unstandardized β	Std. Dev. β	Standardized β
Constant		28.516	4.367	
Active Listening Skills		.735	.311	.675
R	.675			
R^2	.601			
Adj. R^2	.553			

The summary of the simple regression analysis as shown in table 2 indicated that a high positive relationship exists between **active listening skills** and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State as shown by the regression coefficient (R = .675). The coefficient of determination (R^2) of .601 showed that the explanatory power of the variable is moderately strong. This implies that 60% of the variations in teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State are being accounted for or explained by the variations in **active listening skills**. The adjusted R^2 supports the claim of the R^2 with a value of .553 indicating that 55% of the total variation in the dependent variable (teaching partnership) is explained by the independent variable (**active listening skills**). Thus, adjusted R^2 supports the statement that the explanatory power of **active listening skills** is highly strong in determining teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Also, the standardized beta weight (β = .675) showed that a positive relationship exists between **active listening skills** and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This is an indication that increase in **active listening skills** leads to .675 (68%) increase in teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Hypothesis 1: Effective communication skills do not have significant relationship with teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 3: Test of Significance of Simple Regression Analysis on the Relationship between Effective Communication Skills and Teaching Partnership in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

		Unstandardized β	Std. Dev. β	Standardized β	t-value	p-value
Constant		30.318	6.265		19.512	.000
Communication Skills		.758	.214	.682	24.486	.000
R	.682					
R^2	.604					
Adj. R^2	.564					
F	35.307					.000

The summary of the test of significance of simple regression analysis as shown in table 3 revealed that the simple regression coefficient (R) is .682 while the R^2 is .604 and Adjust R^2 is .564. The F-ratio associated with regression is 35.307, the t-test is 24.486 and the P-value = .000. Since p-value (.000) is less than .05 level of significance which resulted in the decision to reject the null hypothesis at p (.000) < .05. The result is further strengthen by the t-value where the result showed that t-calculated value of 24.486 is greater than the critical value of ±1.96 at.05 level of significance. The study therefore rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis that effective communication skills have significant relationship with teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Hypothesis 2: Active listening skills do not have significant relationship with teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 4: Test of Significance of Simple Regression Analysis on the Relationship between active Listening Skills and Teaching Partnership in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

	Unstandardized β	Std. Dev. β	Standardized β	t-value	p-value
Constant	28.516	4.367		18.452	.000
Active Listening Skills	.735	.311	.675	24.191	.000

R	.675	
R^2	.601	
Adj. R^2	.553	
F	32.642	.000

The summary of the test of significance of simple regression analysis as shown in table 4 revealed that the simple regression coefficient (R) is .675 while the R^2 is .601 and Adjust R^2 is .553. The F-ratio associated with regression is 32.642, the t-test is 24.191 and the P-value = .000. Since p-value (.000) is less than .05 level of significance which resulted in the decision to reject the null hypothesis at p(.000) < .05. The result is further strengthen by the t-value where the result showed that t-calculated value of 24.191 is greater than the critical value of ±1.96 at.05 level of significance. The study therefore rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis that active listening skills have significant relationship with teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Discussion of Findings

Findings on the relationship that exists between effective communication skills and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State revealed that there is a high positive relationship between effective communication skills and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The study also indicated that there is a significant relationship that exists between effective communication skills and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This is as a result of the respondents accepting among others that they recognize that how they say something is just as important as what they say; they examine their communication intellect to determine what nonverbal messages they send; they carefully consider the method of delivery of their message which would be best understood by the receiver and they think before they speak because they are aware of how words may not mean the same thing to other people. The findings of the study are in agreement with the findings of Ekong (2018), Obansan (2019) and Shee et al. (2021). These findings showed that effective communication skills have positive and significant relationship with teaching partnership in schools by ways of dissemination of information, the use of simple words for communication and the use of the right words at the right time. Ogomaka et al. (2019), Gugu et al. (2021) and Mba et al. (20121) also revealed that effective communication significantly related to the performance of staff in schools as the inflow of communication from supervisors to subordinate are simple and precise.

Findings on the relationship that exists between active learning skills and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State revealed that there is a high positive relationship between active learning skills and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The study also indicated that there is a significant relationship that exists between active listening skills and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This is as a result of the respondents accepting among others they plan how they respond; they keep eye contact with the speaker; they take notes when necessary; they observe the feeling behind the words and they find themselves not thinking about other things when someone is talking. Agreeing to the findings of the study, Ongori (2019), Alabu (2021), Amie-Ogan and Eziri (20121) disclosed that listening skills are habits that can be used to communicate effectively as it has a positive relationship with individual performance in schools. In the findings of Okoye and Okeke-Okonkwo (2020) and Edo and Omunakwe (2021), they revealed that listening skills significantly predict teaching partnership as the teachers of schools control distracting habits in the environment and plan how they respond to their immediate environment for better productivity.

Conclusion

Conflict at the workplace is an issue and one that can have a negative impact on all areas of organization, from productivity and efficiency to staff morale and retention. Based on the findings of the study presented, analyzed and discussed, the study concluded that there exists relationship between conflict management skills and teaching partnership in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. School administrators should by all means tackle the issues of improper conflict management skills adopted in the school system in order to prompt good teaching partnership in schools.
2. The most effective conflict management skills that promote teaching partnership in schools is effective communication and should be adopted always by the school authorities in conflict resolution in order to create enabling environment for productivity and improved performance.

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