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Principals' Conflict Management Strategies For Administration Of Public Secondary Schools In Bayelsa State

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated principals' conflict management strategies for administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. Two questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population comprised 211 principals in the two hundred and eleven (211) public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. The sample was 202 principals. The sampling technique was census sampling technique. The instrument that was used for data collection in this study was a scale, titled "Principals' Conflict Management Strategies Scale" (PCMSS), developed by the researcher. The face and content validities of the instruments were determined by five (5) experts in test and measurement, from the Faculty of Education and the reliability coefficient was obtained using Cronbach Alpha method to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. The reliability coefficients were as follows: (PCMSS) .81, while the two variables had coefficients of .84 and .79. respectively. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses was tested at 0.05 level of significance using z-test. The findings revealed that ways principals' conflict management strategies are enhanced for administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State include avoiding and accommodating strategies. It was concluded that principals' avoiding and accommodating strategies are the ways principals' conflict management strategies are enhanced for administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommended amongst others, that principals of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State should continue to adopt the avoiding strategy to resolve conflicts. They can do this by encouraging individuals within the school to deliberately ignore or withdraw from a conflict rather than face it. Also principals of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State should continue make use of the accommodating strategy in resolving conflicts that may arise in schools, by ensuring and encouraging individuals in schools to accommodate other peoples' decision.

Keywords: Conflict Management, Principals' Conflict Management Strategies, Administration, Public Secondary Schools, Bayelsa State

INTRODUCTION

Education from time immemorial has been looked upon as the instrument for the transmission of the values and accumulated knowledge of any given society from one generation to the other. In this sense, it is equivalent to what the social scientists term socialization or enculturation. Education is designed to guide individuals in learning a culture, molding their behaviour in the ways of adulthood, and directing them toward their eventual role in society. As the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) puts it, education aims at training the citizens of the nation ensuring that they become useful to themselves, as well as their

society. As the FGN (2014) puts it, one of the goals of education is to create a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens. Education develops a country's economy and therefore, it is the engine room of a nation's development. In Nigeria, there are three levels of education namely; primary, secondary and tertiary education. Secondary education builds on the education received at the primary level and provides the foundation for which tertiary education is built. The achievement of the secondary education goals is essential in determining the success and growth of the educational sector, as education at this level lays out the bedrock for higher manpower skills being developed at the tertiary level. The administration of schools is essential in the attainment of educational goals, hence, the concept of school administration. School administration is important if schools are to make meaningful progresses and developments. School administration is concerned basically with the implementation of the objectives, plans and policies of the school, hence the basic aim of administration is to ensure that school defined objectives are accomplished (Abdulrahman, 2018). On a broader perspective, administration could be seen as an integral part of any organization, and it is critical for maintaining and expanding the relevance, effectiveness and productivity of institutions. It is therefore common to say that school administration refers to the formulation of the school objectives, plans and policies in order to achieve educational goals. At the secondary school level, principals are the administrators. Rybura in Ukpong (2020) had held that secondary school administration is the process of integrating the efforts of human resources and utilizing appropriate materials and services to draw maximum educational benefit from the available resources. School administration is the careful arrangement of the resources (human, material, time, constraints and programs) available in the educational system and systematically mobilizing them to function as a unit for the achievement of educational objectives. It is the achievement of the overall objectives of formal school education. Usually, principals are the leaders in schools, and they manage the day to day activities and running of the schools. They ensure that the school vision and mission are upheld through the administration of the schools. They guide the actions of both teachers and students, create an enabling environment for effective teaching and learning, as well as manage conflicts that arise within the school. The principal is the sole administrator of secondary school in Nigeria, hence the day-to-day administration of Nigerian secondary school system, to a large extent, depends on a cordial and cooperate working relationship among all the stakeholders in the school business including the principals, teachers, learners, parents, school proprietors and even the communities in which the schools are cited. The manner in which organizations manage and navigate these conflicts plays a pivotal role in determining their overall performance and success (Ofobruku, 2022). Conflict is an inevitable occurrence and they happen in organizations. It is regarded as a disagreement between two or more parties. A conflict may arise as a result of a clash between a subordinate and a superior that cannot come to a compromise. It is common to observe that conflicts arise and exist in schools. Conflicts exist in the educational and school system and can occur at any time, and such conflict may arise as a result of disagreement amongst staff, workload, amongst others. It appears no school is devoid of conflicts. The ability to handle and manage such conflict when they arise is very paramount in sustaining the tenets of the school system. The principal, who is the manager of the school, manages conflict and he is expected to proffer solutions to crises that occur within the school. He ensures that conflicts are handled amicably, and warring parties settle amicably, in order to facilitate the teaching and learning process. Conflict management involves using expertise and techniques to resolve conflict within an organization. It pertains to the constructive handling and resolution of conflicts. The goal of conflict management is not necessarily to eliminate all disagreements, but rather to find ways to minimize and manage them in a constructive and positive manner that maintains relationships, promotes understanding, and leads to improved outcomes for all involved (Winardi, Prentice, & Weaven, 2022). When conflict is not properly managed it leads to distractions, decreased focus on tasks and reduced productivity. Conflict management strategies may be characterized as the procedures, controls, or methods used by the principal of a school in an effort to curb conflict's destructive inclinations. They are those tactics or methods that may be applied to stop, manage, or settle conflicts in educational settings. There is therefore an urgent need that every school prioritizes conflict management strategies since they enable the

reduction or management of the negative impacts of disputes (Mbah, Oluka & Alio, 2021). Different disputes may necessitate different conflict management strategies, with the decision based on the nature of the conflict or the persons involved.

Principals' conflict management strategies are essential in solving conflicts in schools. In schools, principals face a myriad of challenges in ensuring effective service delivery by teachers. The educational landscape is often characterized by diverse perspectives, limited resources, and external pressures, contributing to potential conflicts within the school community. To address these challenges, principals must employ the conflict management strategies in order to enhance effective service delivery in public senior secondary schools in River State. Principals' conflict management strategies encompass various approaches aimed at preventing, resolving, or mitigating conflicts in different contexts. Cheta-Maclean (2023) had listed the various conflict management strategies to include amongst others; avoiding and accommodating. The goal is to address conflicts positively, promoting understanding and resolution, while maintaining positive relationships among individuals or groups.

Avoiding strategy of conflict management aims to ignore an issue entirely. This often involves redirecting or postponing difficult conversations. It involves simply *avoiding* the issue at hand. The principals encourage individuals within the school to deliberately ignore or withdraw from a conflict rather than face it. In many instances, people who avoid the situation hope the problem will go away, resolve itself without their involvement or rely on others to take the responsibility. Accommodating as one conflict management strategies is essential in organizations. It describes the ability of one being able to accommodate other peoples' decision. Accepting or agreeing to do it the way others want for peace to reign is essential in conflict management. In organizations, it is imperative to shift grounds and accommodate other people in order to create an enabling environment for progress to thrive. Accommodation may be an effective method if the issue at hand is more important to others compared to oneself (Leslie & Aaron, 2020).

Principals' conflict management strategies are essential in order to foster peace and ensure the success of school goals. As leaders in schools, it is expected that principals manage conflicts that are inevitable in schools. The administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State depends on the peace that exist within the schools, and the avoidance of regular conflicts that do arise. It is essential for principals to manage conflicts properly, using the aforementioned conflict strategies in order to sustain and maintain healthy school administration. It is worthy to note that the successful administration of public secondary schools will not be actualized if there are unresolved conflicts in the schools. For administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State, there is need for principals to adopt conflict management strategies and apply them to the day to day running of the school. In this assertion, the researcher intends to investigate principals' conflict management strategies for administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

Statement of the Problem

Principals are leaders in schools and they manage the day-to-day affairs of the schools, thereby ensuring that there is a positive school climate. Conflicts occur and arise in schools because they are inevitable. In secondary schools, conflicts may be experienced in many issues such as distribution of work among personnel, financial resources, in and out of class teaching activities and practices, rewards, punishment, assessment practices, use of power-authority, being late for class, leave of absences, political views amongst others. It is an interactive process involving disagreement, discrepancy or incompatibility between two or more individuals or groups. The ability to manage conflicts is essential and the onus lies on the principals to make good use of the strategies of conflict management to resolve these conflicts. However, this is not the case in most public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

In most public secondary schools in Bayelsa State, it appears that most principals are not conversant with the various strategies for managing conflicts. Many of them are not acquainted with these strategies used in managing conflicts. It appears it is strange to them to manage conflict using avoiding strategy. Many of the principals are not familiar with this strategy that can be used as a means of avoiding issues or postponing difficult discussions in schools. Also, it appears that many of the principals are not familiar

with the accommodating strategy used in managing conflict. Most of them are not aware that it can be used in managing conflicts that arise in schools. This trend is continuous and the researcher is bothered.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine ways principals' conflict management strategies enhance administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. Specifically, the objectives sought to:

1. determine the ways principals' avoiding strategy enhances administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State
2. find out the ways principals' accommodating strategy enhances administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study

1. In what ways does principals' avoiding strategy enhance administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State?
2. In what ways does principals' accommodating strategy enhance administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in the study at 0.05 level of significance

1. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the ways principals' avoiding strategy enhances administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State
2. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of experienced and less experienced principals on the ways principals' accommodating strategy enhances administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State

METHODOLOGY

The design that was adopted in this study was the descriptive survey design. The population of this study comprised the 211 principals in the (two hundred and eleven) 211 public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. The sample size for this study was 211 principals that were drawn from the 211 public secondary schools in the state. The sampling technique that was used was the census (purposive) sampling technique. The instrument that was used for collection of data in this study was a scale. The instrument for this study was titled "Principals' Conflict Management Strategies Scale" (PCMSS). The face and content validities of the instrument were determined by four experts in the field of Measurement and Evaluation in the Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling in the Faculty of Education of the University of Port Harcourt. The reliability coefficient was determined using Cronbach Alpha Statistics and the coefficients were: principals' conflict management strategies .81, principals' avoiding strategy .84 and principals' accommodating strategy .79. The retrieval rate was 95.7 % (202). Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while the hypotheses was tested at 0.05 level of significance using z-test of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: *In what ways does principals' avoiding strategy enhance administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State?*

Table 4.1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Mean Ratings of Male and Female Principals on Ways Principals' Avoiding Strategy Enhances Administration of Public Secondary Schools in Bayelsa State

S/N	Items	Male Principals 120		Female principals 82		Mean set	
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	$\bar{X}\bar{X}$	Decision
1	Evading individuals who constitute problems regularly in schools is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools	2.55	0.30	2.59	0.26	2.57	Agree
2	Avoiding suspicious gatherings in schools is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools	2.64	0.18	2.70	0.34	2.67	Agree
3	Withdrawing from conflicts is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools	2.59	0.66	2.66	0.78	2.62	Agree
4	Ignoring conflicts rather than facing them is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools	2.66	0.34	2.58	0.11	2.62	Agree
5	Leaving conflict areas is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools	2.72	0.81	3.01	0.39	2.86	Agree
6	Walking away from disagreements is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools	2.90	0.30	3.05	0.71	2.97	Agree
7	Preventing physical fights is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools	2.76	0.28	2.99	0.28	2.87	Agree
8	Withdrawing from gossip discussions is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools	2.65	0.56	2.72	0.65	2.68	Agree
Aggregate mean		2.68	0.48	2.78	0.44	2.73	Agree

Data on Table 4.1 shows that items 1-8 had weighed mean ratings greater than the criterion mean of 2.50 and therefore reveals that, the respondents agree that, the items are ways principals' avoiding strategy enhances administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. In summary, with an aggregate mean of 2.73, which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, male and female principals agree that the ways principals' avoiding strategy enhances administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State are; evading individuals who constitute problems regularly in schools is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, avoiding suspicious gatherings in schools is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, withdrawing from conflicts is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, ignoring conflicts rather than facing them is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, leaving conflict areas is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, walking away from disagreements is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, preventing physical fights is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools and

withdrawing from gossip discussions is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools.

Research Question 2: *In what ways does principals' accommodating strategy enhance administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State?*

Table 4.2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Mean Ratings of Experienced and Less Experienced Principals on Ways Principals' Accommodating Strategy Enhances Administration of Public Secondary Schools in Bayelsa State

S/N	Items	Experienced Principals 120		Less experienced principals 82		Mean set	
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	$\bar{X}\bar{X}$	Decision
9	Accepting other people is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools	2.78	0.10	2.98	0.33	2.88	Agree
10	Being patient with others is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools	2.72	0.86	2.87	0.29	2.79	Agree
11	Being considerate is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools	2.61	0.32	2.71	0.31	2.66	Agree
12	Not being selfish is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools	2.80	0.59	3.01	0.45	2.90	Agree
13	Paying attention to the needs of the other person is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools	2.91	0.19	2.88	0.28	2.89	Agree
14	Allowing the other part to talk is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools	2.88	0.22	2.60	0.48	2.74	Agree
15	Offering genuine assistance is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools	2.55	0.43	3.10	0.10	2.82	Agree
16	Being kind and generous is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools	2.90	0.79	2.86	0.22	2.88	Agree
Aggregate mean		2.76	0.43	2.87	0.30	2.82	Agree

Data on Table 4.2 shows that items 9-16 had weighed mean ratings greater than the criterion mean of 2.50 and therefore reveals that, the respondents agree that, the items are ways principals' accommodating strategy enhances administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. In summary, with an aggregate mean of 2.82, which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, male and female principals agree that the ways principals' accommodating strategy enhances administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State are; accepting other people is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, being patient with others is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, being considerate is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, not being selfish is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, paying attention to the needs of the other person is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, allowing the other part to talk is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, offering genuine assistance is one way of

managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools and being kind and generous is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the ways principals’ avoiding strategy enhances administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State

Table 4.3: Summary of z-test Analysis of the Mean Ratings of Male and Female Principals on the Ways Principals’ Avoiding Strategy Enhances Administration of Public Secondary Schools in Bayelsa State

Category	N	\bar{x}	std	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Sig.	Decision
Male Principals	120	2.68	.48	200	2.03	1.96	0.05	reject null hypothesis
Female Principals	82	2.78	.44					

P<0.05

Data on Table 4.3 shows summary of z-test analysis of the mean ratings of male and female principals on the ways principals’ avoiding strategy enhances administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. The z-calculated value obtained was 2.03, while the z-critical value was 1.96, using 200 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. From the presentation, the calculated value of 2.03 is greater than the z-critical value of 1.96; hence, there is a significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals. Based on the observations, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative that, there is a significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the ways principals’ avoiding strategy enhances administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of experienced and less experienced principals on the ways principals’ accommodating strategy enhances administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State

Table 4.4: Summary of z-test Analysis of the Mean Ratings of Experienced and Less Experienced Principals on the Ways Principals’ Accommodating Strategy Enhances Administration of Public Secondary Schools in Bayelsa State

Category	N	\bar{x}	std	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Sig.	Decision
Experienced Principals	120	2.76	.43	200	1.98	1.96	0.05	reject null hypothesis
Less experienced Principals	82	2.87	.30					

P<0.05

Data on Table 4.4 shows summary of z-test analysis of the mean ratings of experienced and less experienced principals on the ways principals’ accommodating strategy enhances administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. The z-calculated value obtained was 1.98, while the z-critical value was 1.96, using 200 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. From the presentation, the calculated value of 1.98 is greater than the z-critical value of 1.96; hence, there is a significant difference between the mean ratings of experienced and less principals. Based on the observations, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative that, there is a significant difference between the mean ratings of experienced and less experienced principals on the ways principals’ accommodating strategy enhances administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Avoiding Strategy for Administration of Public Secondary Schools

Findings revealed that ways principals’ avoiding strategy enhances administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State are; evading individuals who constitute problems regularly in schools is one way

of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, avoiding suspicious gatherings in schools is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, withdrawing from conflicts is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, ignoring conflicts rather than facing them is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, leaving conflict areas is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, walking away from disagreements is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, preventing physical fights is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools and withdrawing from gossip discussions is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools. This corroborates the finding of Fatile (2021)), which discovered that this method can also serve as a temporary measure to give parties time to cool off or to gather more information before engaging in resolution efforts.

Accommodating Strategy for Administration of Public Secondary Schools

Results from the finding revealed that ways principals' accommodating strategy enhances administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State are; accepting other people is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, being patient with others is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, being considerate is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, not being selfish is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, paying attention to the needs of the other person is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, allowing the other part to talk is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools, offering genuine assistance is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools and being kind and generous is one way of managing conflict for administration of public secondary schools. Being able or possessing the ability to accept other people and their opinion is a way in resolving conflicts. In many cases, the leader fails to proper look at the main issue that led to the crisis or conflict. This is in agreement with Shariq et al. (2022) who stressed that some conflicts in secondary schools occur due to lack of proper diagnosis leading to crisis and that they are not understood or not managed properly.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that, principals' avoiding and accommodating strategies enhance administration of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study:

1. Principals of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State should continue to adopt the avoiding strategy to resolve conflicts. They can do this by encouraging individuals within the school to deliberately ignore or withdraw from a conflict rather than face it.
2. Principals of public secondary schools in Bayelsa State should continue make use of the accommodating strategy in resolving conflicts that may arise in schools. This can be done by ensuring and encouraging individuals in schools to accommodate other peoples' decision.

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