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Principals' and Teachers' use of Conflict Management Strategies on Secondary Students' Conflict Resolution in Rivers State- Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study was designed to identify the principals' and teachers' level of utilization of conflict management strategies: integrating, dominating, compromising and avoiding strategies on secondary students' conflict resolution and their related implications in the internal school administration. Four research questions and four hypotheses addressed the study. The instrument used for the generation of data was the Secondary Students and Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire (SECONSQ). A sample of 7 principals and 147 teachers were randomly selected from a target population of 14 principals and 294 teachers in Government Junior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. Tables were constructed, frequency counts, percentage and means computed to provide answers to the research questions. The results revealed that the principals uses the integrating and compromising strategies more frequently than the teachers;the teachers level in the use of avoiding strategies is higher than that of the principals, and teachers tends to overlook to a large extent the use of dominating strategies in the management of students' conflict. Based on these findings the paper concluded that school managers are beginning to understand the legal implications associated in their administrative duties bordering on students' management. It was thus recommended that, relevant institutional frameworks should be appropriately put in place to enable the principals and teachers further appreciate the emerging ideas and innovations concerning students' conflicts management in schools.

Introduction

Conflict resolution involves the reduction, elimination, or termination of all forms and types of conflicts. Hence, conflict resolution tend to use terms like negotiation, bargaining, mediation or arbitration. While conflict management is a method incorporated to facilitate a positive or at least an agreeable outcome. Principals and teachers do involve in conflict resolution and management in the school system on issues bordering on students' discipline and control.

In Nigeria and most other parts of the world, students are being controlled and guided in schools by rules and regulations, school time tables, and curriculum contents etc. These however, affectstudents' behaviour and learning. Teachers who implement the organizational control patterns are also faced with other statutory duties, such as: updating Continuous Assessment Records, Class Registers, Diaries and Scheme of Work. The principals and teachers do have constraints than any other member of the society as they may be required to be diligent, honest, and responsible, irrespective of the conflicts that could arise in the schools while performing these roles. Therefore, when conflict arises, they must be managed with a view to resolving them, using either of these strategies: integrating, compromising, avoiding, and dominating

Integrating strategy focuses on gathering and organizing information; at the same time, it encourages creative thinking and welcomes diverse perspectives. This strategy enable parties involve in conflict to pool all their information together, put their differences on the table and examine them along with any data that might contribute to a resolution. This leads to the development of alternative solution which addresses all parts of the conflict, other than the initial solutions of the parties. What this imply in the school system is that, both the school authority and students must be able and willing to contribute time, energy, and resources to finding and implementing a solution.

Dominating strategy is used by the school manager to resolve the conflict by dictating what the subordinates will do. That is, school management simply resolves conflict as it sees fit and communicates its desires to the students. The students usually will abide by a superior's decision, whether or not the students agree with it. Specifically, it advocates the establishment of a superordinate- subordinate relationship (Kalagbor, 2003). Iwowari (2007) posits that the dominating strategy does not allow input from the students in the school system.

Compromizing strategy is a middle of the road strategy that gets every one talking about issues and moves one closer to each other and to a resolution. In compromise, each person has something to give and something to take. In the school system compromise is more effective when issues are complex and parties in conflict looking for middle ground, and willing to exchange concessions. Hence, negotiation and bargaining are complementary skills.

Conflict avoidance occurs when one party in a potential conflict ignores the conflicting issues or denies the significant of the conflict to his life. It is a way of not addressing the conflict, or a tactical way of postponing the conflict for a better time, if at all such time will come. Note that in this situation, the principal or teacher is unassertive, and uncooperative. There is no

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intention to pursue one's own needs or the needs of the school. It connotes, the process of withdrawing from conflict situations in the school that might cause unpleasantness for the principal or teacher.

From the forgoings, it should be stated that the school as a social system has its own norms and values and it is characterized by complex relationships between members of the system: principals, teachers, non-teaching staff and students. Due to the high degree of interdependence of duties and individual differences in role expectations, conflicts do arise from different circumstances and situations among members of the school system and would be addressed by the application of the above mentioned strategies.

In a related perspective, the major orientation of the school therefore, has been on supporting the society to socialize the students to be worthwhile as future leaders. As it is in any other institution, schools are characterized by social conflicts emanating from interactions among group members and formal structure of authority. The school involve dimensional conflicts both in the structural and behavioural patterns of the individuals in the system.

The above backdrops suggest that, it is imperative for principals and teachers to develop the relevant skills and styles to manage students' conflicts with a view to achieving the aims and objectives of the educational curriculum in secondary schools, specifically in Rivers State- Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria today, there exist basically a national system of education. Despite this, schools are diverse in their organizational structure with attendant emerging conflicts arising therefrom. To enhance goal achievement, school officials (Principal and teachers) operate on formal organizational structures which enable them in the performance of their institutional daily activities.

In spite of these operational guidelines, school officials are observed to engage on diversified approaches on general school administration which invariably breeds conflicts. Nevertheless, the impact of these diversities in the management of these schools leads to certain conflicts arising within the administration as a result of nomothetic dimension which stresses institutional roles, rules, regulations and procedures for getting things done to achieve institutional goals; and the ideographicdimension, which stresses social interaction of individual's need. Therefore, conflicts create serious administrative problems particularly in the school system, and need to be addressed, with a view to resolving them as they arises.

The study therefore examined principals' and teachers' conflict management strategies in the secondary schools. In otherwords, the study tend to identify the extent different conflict management strategies are used by principals and teachers in students' conflict resolution, and their related implications in internal school administration. in Rivers State-Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

1. The study sought to determinePrincipals and teachers level of utilization of integrating strategy in the management of students' conflicts in schools.
2. Principals and teachers level of utilization of dominating strategy in the management of students' conflicts in schools.
3. Principals and teachers level of utilization of the compromising strategy in the management of students' conflicts in schools.
4. Principals and teachers level of utilization of the avoiding strategy in the management of students' conflicts in schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions addressed the problem and objectives of this study.

1. What is the level of opinions of principals and teachers about their use of the integrating strategy in the management of students' conflicts in the Government Junior Secondary Schools?
2. What is the level of opinions of principals and teachers about their use of the dominating strategy in the management of students' conflicts in the Government Junior Secondary Schools?
3. What is the level of opinions of principal and teachers about their use of the compromising strategy in the management of students' conflicts in the Government Junior Secondary Schools?
4. What is the level of opinions of principal and teachers about their use of the avoiding strategy in the management of students' conflicts in the Government Junior Secondary Schools?

Methodology

The study was basically a descriptive survey design. The population comprised all the fourteen (14) principals, and five hundred and eighty – eight (588) teachers in the fourteen (14) Universal Basic Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. The sample size which consisted of 7 principals and 147 teachers was selected through the simple random technique.

A 16 items structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The data collected were analysed using the frequency counts, percentage, and mean rating. The instrument was validated by two professors in Educational Management. The internal consistency and the reliability of instrument were tested using Pearson – Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient which yielded a score of 0.85.

The modified four- point Likert response scale was used in providing answers to the questionnaire items. KEY: strongly agree = 4points; agree: 3points; disagree: 2points; strongly disagree: 1point.

Presentation, Analysis and Discussion Of Findings

The analyses of data and discussion of findings from the Secondary Students' and Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire (SECONSQ), which provided answers to the research questions, were presented thus:

Research Question 1

What is the level of opinions of principals and teachers about their use of the integrating strategy in the management of students' conflicts in schools?

Table 1 shows that the level of the principals opinions in the use of integrating strategy in the management of students' conflicts (mean of 64) was higher than the teacher (mean of 58) agreement respectively; although both principals and teachers are positive in the use of their integrating strategy.

Research Question 2

What is the level of opinion of principals and teachers about their use of the dominating strategy in the management of students' conflicts in schools?

Table 2 shows that the level of teachers' opinions in the use of dominating strategy in the management of students' conflicts (mean of 45) was slightly lower than the principals' (mean of 47) agreement. The indication here is that both the principals and teachers do not use frequently dominating strategy in the management of students' conflicts with means of 53 and 55 disagreement respectively.

Table 1.Raw Score and Percentage of Opinion of the Principals and Teachers Use of their Integrating Strategy in the Management of Students Conflicts in Schools

S/N	ITEM	PRINCIPALS					TEACHERS				
		N	A	%	D	%	N	A	%	D	%
1.	Students' conflict issues are investigated before any conflict is resolved.	7	3	43	4	57	120	60	50	60	50
2.	Students involved in a conflict are always allowed to find solutions to the resolution of the conflict in the school.	7	5	71	2	29	120	82	68	38	32
3.	The consensus decisions in the resolution of students conflicts are often re-enforced.	7	4	57	3	43	120	70	58	50	42
4.	Creative thinking and diversified perspectives are adopted to minimize students' conflicts in the school.	7	6	86	1	14	120	62	57	58	43
	TOTAL	28	18	257	10	143	480	274	233	206	167
	MEAN	7	4.5	64	2.5	36	120	68.5	58	51.5	42

Table 2. Raw Score and Percentage of Opinions of the Principals and Teachers on their Use of the Dominating Strategy in the Management of Students Conflicts in Schools

S/N	ITEM	PRINCIPALS					TEACHERS				
		N	A	%	D	%	N	A	%	D	%
1.	Force is not frequently used to resolve students' conflicts in the school.	7	2	29	5	71	120	50	42	70	58
2.	Students involved in a conflict are not denied their rights of participationin conflict resolution.	7	3	43	4	57	120	60	50	60	50
3.	Lasting resolutions of students' conflicts are guaranteed in my school.	7	5	71	2	29	120	65	54	55	46
4.	Quick or hasty decisions are not always taken in the management ofstudents' conflicts in my school.	7	3	43	4	57	120	40	33	80	67
	TOTAL	28	13	186	15	214	480	215	179	265	221
	MEAN	7	3.2	47	3.8	53	120	54	45	66	55

Table 3. Raw Score and Percentage of Opinion of the Principals and Teachers ontheir Use of the Compromising Strategy in the Management of Students Conflicts in Schools

S/N	ITEM	PRINCIPALS					TEACHERS				
		N	A	%	D	%	N	A	%	D	%
1.	Students are encouraged to make concessions as a way to resolve their conflicts in the school.	7	6	86	1	14	120	40	33	80	67
2.	In my school, students are moderately satisfied irrespective of who wins or losses in any conflict.	7	3	43	4	57	120	36	30	84	70
3.	In my school, students are always allowed room to meet privately for settlement of their conflicts.	7	2	29	5	71	120	68	57	52	43
4.	Expedient mutually acceptable solutions to conflicts among students is guaranteed in my school.	7	4	57	3	43	120	60	50	60	50
	TOTAL	28	15	215	13	185	480	204	170	276	230
	MEAN	7	4	54	3	46	120	51	42	69	58

Table 4. Raw Score and Percentage of Opinion of the Principals and Teachers on their Use of the Avoiding Strategy in the Management of Students Conflicts in Schools

S/N	ITEM	PRINCIPALS					TEACHERS				
		N	A	%	D	%	N	A	%	D	%
1.	Students are encouraged to ignore the conflicting issues for peace to be in the school.	7	7	100	0	0	120	64	53	56	47
2.	Students are afraid of pursing a matter against the school authority but instead seek for leniency.	7	3	43	4	57	120	78	65	42	35
3.	Conflicting students' matters were set-aside due to pressing administrative and academic issues.	7	2	29	5	71	120	50	42	70	58
4.	Students do not forgo their conflicts to avoid immediate sanctions by the school authority.	7	2	29	5	71	120	67	56	53	44
	TOTAL	28	14	201	14	199	480	259	216	221	184
	MEAN	7	3.5	50	3.5	50	120	65	54	55	46

Research Question 3

What is the level of opinions of principals and teachers about their use of the compromising strategy by the principals in the management of students conflicts in schools?

Table 3 shows that the principals level of opinions in the use of compromising strategy in the management of students' conflicts (mean of 54) was higher than the teachers' (mean of 42) agreement respectively.

Answer to Research Questions

Research Question 4

What is the level of opinions of the principals and teachers about their use of avoiding strategy in the management of students' conflicts in schools?

Table 4 shows that the level of the principals opinions about the use of avoiding strategy in the management of students' conflicts was lower (mean of 50) than the teachers (mean of 56) agreement. The indication in table 4 however was that teachers uses the avoiding strategy than the principals.

Discussion of Findings

The percentage(%) score of the principals as shown in table 1 shows that the principals uses integrating strategy in the management of students' conflict than the teachers. In otherwords, it indicate that principals have better knowledge on the needs and implications for the adoption of the integrating approach.

This result shows that both principals and teachers do not adopt this strategy at the same level, their level of understanding on the importance of the integrating strategy which has to do with: investigating students cases, students involvement; consensus judgement and creative thinking differs.

Principals effective utilization of the integrating approach or strategy may be as a result of the establishment of disciplinary committees by the principals in their various schools. This is a method that stimulate students, improves their sense of belonging, and allows fair hearing in the school system. For, according to Acholonu (1991), good administrators are concerned in stimulating members to take actions towards achieving describe goals. This means that through consultations and team work (participatory approach) school administrators, particularly the principals, can minimize students' conflicts which by implication will enhance administrative effectiveness and students' academic achievement.

In the second finding, indication in table 2 was that both the principals and teachers do not frequently use or adopt the dominating strategy in the management of students' conflicts in schools, although teachers uses this strategy more often than the principals (principals' mean percentage: 45 agreement and teachers mean percentage:47 agreement respectively).

In the dominating strategy, mention has to be made that the school authority (principals and teachers) do not use their authority and power to resolve students' conflicts by dictating what the students must agree and do. The finding here imply that both the principals and teachers do not resolve students' conflicts as they deemed fit, and do not to a large extent place themselves in the position of dictators when deciding conflicts involving the students. Furthermore, it exposes the fact that both the principals and teachers understands the administrative and legal implications in their use of dominating strategy.

The implication of the finding above is further derived from Ochianya (2006) argument that even if the assertive person "succeeds" in "winning" the case, there is a tendency that the "resolution" will leave behind grudges in the other party. Also was Kalagbor (2007) research finding that principals and teachers that tends to infringe on students' right in course of managing any form of students' conflict in school may attract the sanction of the court system if consulted. Nevertheless, the opinions of the principals and teachers (45% and 47% agreement) in the use of dominating strategy shown in the study have actually buttressed Igwe (1990) finding that the number of court cases already instituted against principals and teachers have exposed them on students' conflict management issues.

Sucintly, the implication of this finding is that the power relationship and assertiveness which hitherto characterized the relationship between school managers and students, specifically in the area of conflict management have diminished. Afterall, discipline and control within the context of parental jurisdiction stood as a major routine role of principals and teachers in the school environment.

It was revealed in the third finding of this study that principals uses the compromising strategy effectively than the teachers in the management of students' conflicts in schools.The issue here is a fact. Compromising conflict management strategy is most importantly adopted in a complex conflict matter. The parties involved (the students) must be willing to exchange concessions. Particularly, it involves negotiation and bargaining. However, due to the complex and sensitive nature of students' issues, teachers have limited authority in the management of students' conflicts than the principals. It was not surprised therefore that the teachers hardly adopted this strategy.

Davis and Lewis (1971), 42 years ago, had asserted that the extent to which compromising strategy needs to be utilized is somewhat dependent on the amount of agreement that exist between the groups on basic values and goals. At present, the agreement implied above can only be sustained by super-ordinate authority, which in the school system is the principal. That is, the teacher even when he had adopted this strategy, must seek the support and approval of the principal on the decision taken in order to sustain the agreement between the parties involved, if not the agreement may to a large extent be a nullity.

The fourth finding shows clearly that teachers uses the avoiding conflict management strategy in attending to students matters than the principals.Within the school system, observations has shown that teachers frequently ignore students' conflict issues, and do not in most cases attend to those issues. This is not a welcomed exercise in school administration, particularly in students' management. Moreso, attending to any student conflict matter, even though temporarily, is not only aim to guaranteeing immediate sanity, but it is an equivalent of given a first-aid treatment to a patient. Hence, teachers adoption of this strategy in the school system is mostly dangerous and do affect not just the safety situation of the school environment, but most importantly it has negative effect on students' overall academic achievements.

Teachers use of avoiding strategy is a way of protecting themselves from the inactions of some irresponsible and undisciplined students who might be provoked by the manner the teacher had managed the conflicts. This finding, therefore supports the opinion of Kilman and Thomas in Iwowari (2007) that the avoidance style implies, withdrawing from situations that might cause unpleasantness for oneself. This, however shows apathy and indifference of teachers on students' management and thus, posits a threat to principals on issues that border on students' management effectiveness. Specifically, it implied that the teachers' inaction on students' conflict is a breach on their 'duty of care' role and makes them ineffective in rendering supervisory services in the school system. Furthermore, it could be interpreted as negligence of duty which

could be actionable in court where a student suffered some damages as a result of the teacher's avoidance.

Conclusion

The focus of this study was to determine the extent the principals and teachers use the Integrating, Compromising, Dominating and Avoiding strategies in the management of students' conflicts in the secondary schools, and their related implications in the internal school management. The study revealed that the principals use the integrating, compromising strategies than the teachers in the management of students' conflict; teachers level in the use of avoiding strategy is higher than that of the principals; and Principals and teachers tends to overlook to a large extent the dominating strategy in students' conflict management.

The revelation of this study specifically indicates the principals as the major role players in the management of students in the school system. Teachers have the wrong notion that the success or failure of the internal school administration is vested on the principals, hence teachers reluctantly do fail to give proper attention to students' management issues bordering on students conflicts, thereby increasingly tasking and over labouring their respective principals on students matters which is an aspect of the general school management. But the ability to successfully minimise and resolve conflict is an important skill for the principals and teachers to develop.

Sucintly, this study outcome goes further to imply that school managers are beginning to understand and appreciate the legal implications associated with students' management matters. The participatory approach of principals, and to some extent the teachers in the utilization of the integrating, compromising and non-frequent use of the dominating strategies specifically gives meaning to Cole in Kalagbor (2007) assertion that, it is important for school managers at any level of responsibility to understand the legal framework that applied to the work place.

The study further revealed that while other strategies could be used in resolving students' conflicts, the dominating strategy should be avoided at all costs because the long term effect can be devastating. In addition, the outcome of the study suggests that the compromizing and integrating styles of conflict management should be used jointly in resolving students' conflicts due to the reason that the strategies are participatory and democratic in nature and practice. While the avoiding and dominating strategies may not be suggested to be reasonable styles of resolving conflicts because they connotes injustice and threat to conflict resolution.

Recommendations

This paper recommends as follows

1. Inspite of the nature of this study outcome, it is very imperative that the Schools Board should organize regular workshops, seminars, conferences and orientation programmes for principals and teachers on students' conflict management strategies. This is appropriate to improve these educators' knowledge, particularly the emerging ideas and innovations concerning students' conflicts management in schools.
2. Both principals and teachers should be educated on the negative implications in the use of the avoiding strategy. Avoiding strategy represents low degree of assertiveness and low degree of cooperativeness between principals and teachers.
3. Infusing and integrating conflict resolution into the school curriculum and culture is also imperative. This can be accomplished in the following ways:

a) Teaching a stand-alone course which covers the basic concepts and skills.

b) Integrating core concepts and skills into a single discipline course, such as:Language Arts, Social Studies, Health Science.

c) Teaching a stand-alone course and integrating core concepts and skills into a variety of other disciplines.

d) Infusing conflict resolution concepts, skills and values into the day to day activities of the classroom, including teaching strategies, teachable moments.

e) Institutionalizing the practices and principles of conflict resolution, social and emotional learning and inter-group relations into the culture and policies of the school.

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