PRINCIPALS-TEACHERS' CONFLICT AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN AWKA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

by

IGBOKWE, Innocent Chiawa (Ph.D),
AKUDO, Florence Ukamaka (Ph.D) &
UGWU, Stephen Anichukwu

Department of Educational Management and Policy,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
ic.igbokwe@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract
This study examined principal-teachers' conflict and management strategies in secondary schools in Awka South Local Government Area. The research adopted survey research design. The population consist of 1,100 teachers and sample size is 230 teachers. Questionnaire was used to obtain relevant information from 230 respondents in the study area. The instrument was validated by experts and considered reliable using Cronbach Alpha. The data collected using some research assistants, were presented in tables and analyzed using mean deviation. The findings revealed that, among others, some of the causes of principal-teacher conflicts include: principal’s indifference to teachers’ problems, poor communication in the school, role ambiguity or lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities. The study found out that principals’ discussion with teachers before certain decisions are taken; good human relationship between principals and teachers; involvement of school board and PTA members for school administration; and mediation, among others, are some of the strategies for managing conflicts between principals and teachers. Consequently, it was recommended that the appropriate authorities, school principals, and teachers should ensure that there are Teachers Representative Councils (TRC), established for the management of conflict in the school, this will help reduce and check any form of biased tendency and as well create the spirit of peaceful coexistence and teamwork.

Keywords: Conflict, principals, teachers, secondary school etc.

Introduction
Education, over the years, has grown to become an integral part of human existence. It is generally described as the act of or process of acquiring knowledge and the theory of teaching and learning. Education is viewed by Ofojebe and Nnebedum (2016) as a vital tool for inculcation of the right values and skills necessary for the development of individuals and the society at large. This explains why some nations budget a lot for education. Babatunde (2014) averred that education is the backbone of development in any nation and serve as a tool for a united, independent, wealthy and egalitarian society.

Secondary education is the education that children receive after primary education and before going to tertiary institution (National Education Policy, 2015). According to Okeke-James, Igbokwe, Anyanwu and Obineme, (2020), it is a vital educational institution where people are groomed into useful living, receive formal education, imbibe the acceptable values, skills and knowledge of the society for self-actualization and socio-economic development. It is an
indispensable level of education aimed at developing individual for useful living and socio-economic development. The head of management of the secondary school is the principal, who is assisted by a vice and other members of staff (teachers).

Principals are those who are expected to perform administrative functions including: planning, organizing, supervising, staffing, evaluating, coordinating, leadership and purchasing and maintenance of instructional materials, equipment and facilities (Uzoigwe, 2013). They are the key players in secondary education and managers in secondary schools (Okeke-James, Igbokwe, Anyanwu & Ogbo, 2020). They occupy executive position in schools. Principals are responsible for the smooth running of schools and play multifaceted roles in setting the direction of secondary schools (Adeniyi, 2014). The principal sets the direction of policies, acceptable standards for academic and behavioural achievement of students, establishes a friendly school climate and influences the commitment of every stakeholder in the society for the achievement of the educational goals. Similarly, a principal must be in a position to guide and provide expertise guardian in regards to curriculum development, teaching methods, and valuation as well as supervision of human and material resources. For the school to function well, the principal must be in a position to exploit all possible means to keep a healthy environment for the students, staff and the general public. Therefore, the principal, who is the chief executive officer of a school should guide and inspire the teachers for job satisfaction.

Teachers, on the other hand, are those who have undergone an approved professional training in education at an appropriate level capable of imparting knowledge, attitude and skills to the learner. They have direct contact with the students and influence largely the activities of the students in the school. The teachers work under the leadership of the principals. The school as an organization operates within an appointed leadership, who defines and assigns roles to individual teachers, based on their areas of competence, all working towards the achievement of school goals and objectives. However, principals and teachers have conflict from time to time. This is usually caused by a lot of factors.

Conflict between principal and teachers no doubt will affect academic activities, which is the primary objective of the school in the first place. In line with this, Onsarigo (2007) posited that conflict is the order of the day in schools as teachers hardly accept their delegated responsibilities like monitoring students’ behaviour, mark registers, prepare lesson plans, record financial report, and mark assessment and examinations. Conflict between the principal and teachers may occur because for varied reasons. Issues ranging from teaching methods, continuous assessment method, income generation and management matters, principals’ leadership style and a host of others may cause conflict between principal and teachers. According to Ugwuanyi (2011), in the school system, possible areas of conflict between the principals and teachers include leadership style, communication, school policy, decision making, and delegation of duties as well as role definitions/assignments. This shows that possible areas of principal-teacher conflict include school policy, leadership style, decision making processes, communication, school policy and so on. Conflicts can be better resolved through conflict management strategies.

Conflict Management deals with positive means and processes of resolving conflicts and stopping it from escalating. It is vital to promote healthier school climate. According to Kalagbor and Nnokam (2015), it is a method incorporated to facilitate a positive or at least an agreeable outcome in order to reduce, eliminate or terminate all forms and types of conflicts. Some skills are required in order to fruitfully undergo the processes of conflict management.
The styles of conflict management are essential in handling conflicts in secondary schools and prominent among them include competing, avoiding, collaborating, compromising, accommodating and mediation (Shahmohammadi, 2014). Other strategies for managing conflicts are integrating and dominating. When all the parties in a conflict decides to come to a consensus or middle ground in order to resolve conflict, this is compromising strategy. When one of the parties in a conflict totally decides to let go the conflicting issue, it is avoiding strategy. When parties in a conflict decide to accept the perspectives of the other party and resolves the conflict, it is accommodating strategy. When parties to a conflict decide to allow a third party with skills in managing conflict to assist in the conflict resolution, it is called mediation. When one party imposes its decision and dictates to the other party what to do in order to resolve conflict, it is dominating strategy. In any case, any strategy for managing or handling conflict must be given a professional and skillful touch. Thus, this work explores principal-teachers’ conflict and management strategies in secondary schools in Awka South Local Government Area.

Statement of the Problem
It seems that unresolved and improperly managed conflict is one of the major setbacks to educational development in Nigeria. The incessant conflicts between principals and teachers in public secondary schools seem to become worrisome to the government and other stakeholders in Education. This appears to happen more in secondary schools owned by the government. Specifically, the researchers observed that conflicts occur frequently among secondary school teachers and principals in Awka South Local Government Area. This is as a result of institutional and personal factors. These include things like status differences, communication, generational gaps, role ambiguities and expectations. The conflicts were often suppressed without serious explorations of modern means of conflict management strategies which sometimes leads to escalation of conflicts and dysfunctional educational system.

It is against this background that it becomes necessary to identify the causes of conflicts and examine ways through which such conflicts could be resolved. Based on the foregoing, the researcher is interested in investigating principals -teachers’ conflict and management strategies in secondary schools in AwkaSouth Local Government Area.

Purpose of the Study
The main purpose of this study is to determine principals -teachers’ conflict and management strategies in secondary schools in AwkaSouth Local Government Area. The specific purpose is to:
1. Identify the causes of conflicts between principals and teachers in public secondary schools in AwkaSouth Local Government Area
2. Ascertain the strategies to be adopted for managing conflicts between principals and teachers in AwkaSouth Local Government Area

Research Questions
The following questions guided this study
1. What are the causes of conflicts between principals and teachers in public secondary schools in in AwkaSouth Local Government Area?
2. What are the strategies to be adopted for managing conflicts between principals and teachers in public secondary schools in in AwkaSouth Local Government Area?
Method
This study adopted descriptive survey design. Nworgu (2015) defines descriptive survey design as those studies that aim at collecting data, and describing them in a systematic way, the features and characteristics of a given population. It is to provide the opinion of the respondents on principals -teachers’ conflict and management strategies in secondary schools in Awka South Local Government Area. The design is considered appropriate because it allows for the collection of data from a sample that is a true representation of the population in a systematic manner. It also permits the collection of data from respondents in the natural setting.

The area of this study is Awka South, Anambra State. Awka South local government area is one of the local government areas that make up the state capital city, Awka, which is the seat of government. It has a good number of public secondary schools; therefore, it is appropriate to generalize a study done here for the entire state. Awka South Local Government Area is bounded to the north by Awka North Local Government Area, to the west by Njikoka Local Government Area, to the south by Anaocha Local Government Area and to the east by Orumba North Local Government Area.

The population of this study consist of all the teachers in the 23 public secondary schools in Awka South Local Government Area. According to the Post Primary School Service Commission (PPSS) Awka zone, there are 1100 teachers in the 2018/2019 school year.

The sample for this study is 230 teachers. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 10% number of teachers from each public secondary school in Awka Local Government Area, amounting to 230 teachers.

Researchers’ developed instrument was constructed on a four-point rating scale of SA-Strongly Agree, (4 points), A-Agree – 3 points, D-Disagree (2 points) and SD-Strongly Disagree (1 point). The questionnaire is divided into two sections. Section A deals with the personal data of the respondents. Section B consists of 30 items arranged in two clusters. Cluster A is on causes of conflict between principals and teachers in secondary schools in Anambra State and cluster B is on strategies for managing conflicts between principals and teachers.

The instrument was subjected to face validation by three experts; two in educational management and one in educational measurement and evaluation. All the experts are lecturers in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Consequently, the reliability of the instrument was conducted in Oji Local Government Area of Enugu State which has boundary with Awka. Cronbach Alpha was used and these yielded reliability indices of 0.80 for Cluster A and 0.75 for Cluster B, which yielded an overall coefficient of 0.82. Thus, it was considered reliable in line with the view of Gliem and Gliem (2003) that the closer Cronbach Alpha coefficient is to 1.0, the greater the internal consistency of the items in the scale.

The data were analyzed in tables using mean, nominal value were assigned to the items as follows: Strongly Agreed = 4, Agreed = 3, Disagreed = 2, and Strongly Disagreed= 1. Any item that has mean of 2.50 and above was regarded as agree while mean scores below 2.50 was regarded as disagree.
Research Question 1
What are the causes of conflicts between principals and teachers in public secondary schools in AwkaSouth Local Government Area?

Table 1: Mean rating of respondents on the causes of conflicts between principals and teachers in public secondary schools in Awka South Local Government Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>The causes of conflicts between principals and the teachers are:</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>∑fx</th>
<th>( \bar{x} )</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Principal’s indifference to teachers’ problems</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>694</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Poor communication in the school</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Role ambiguity or lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teachers’ laissez-faire attitude to school work</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Poor teaching environment</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Issuing of queries to teachers by the principal</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>632</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Uncooperative attitude of teachers</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Favouritism on the part principals</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Exclusion of teachers in decision-making</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Lack of recognition of teachers’ efforts by principal</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Principal’s high-handedness in school administration</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Principals asking for punitive transfers of teachers through the PPSMB</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Conflict of interests between principals and teachers</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ambition of teachers</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Ambition of principals</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grand Mean 2.72 AGREE

From the above table, items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11 and 13 have mean score above the cutoff point of 2.50. This implies that these items are factors that cause principal-teacher conflicts in public secondary schools in Awka South Local Government Area. Conversely, items 7, 8, 12, 14 and 15 have mean scores below cut of point of 2.50. This implies that those items are not factors that cause principal-teacher conflicts in public secondary schools in Awka South Local Government Area. The grand mean is also above cut off point which goes further to affirm the fact that most items listed above are causes of principal-teacher conflicts in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Question 2
What are the strategies to be adopted for managing conflicts between principals and teachers in public secondary schools in Awka South Local Government Area?

Table 2: Mean responses on the conflict management strategies adopted in public secondary schools inAwka South Local Government Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Strategies for managing conflicts in schools are</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>∑fx</th>
<th>( \bar{x} )</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Principals dialoguing with the teachers before certain decisions are taken</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Good human relationship between the principals and the teachers</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Invite officials of the school board to assist and hold</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
regular meetings with the P.T.A members for a better administration of the school

19 Involving both parties in discussing on how best to resolve the conflict, (conference strategy) is necessary

20 Principals and teachers tolerating one another

21 Use of mediation to resolve principal-teacher conflicts

22 Principals’ recommendations of teachers for promotion is a strategy for promoting peace between them and teachers

23 Principals organization of in-service training for teachers is a mechanism for promoting peace in schools

24 Teachers obedient to principals’ authority is a strategy for maintaining peace

25 Principals’ prudent management of school resources generates teachers respect

26 Teachers’ efficiency reduces disagreement between them and principals

27 Having a common organizational goal and objective in school, bridges the gap between principal and teachers

28 Teachers’ acceptance and adoption of principals’ recommendations breeds harmonious relationship between them.

29 Inter-house sports and other social activities in school strengthen the bonds between principals and teachers

30 Inter-school debates and sporting competition strengthen the bonds between principals and teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Level of Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>230 695 3.02</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>230 741 3.22</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>230 592 2.57</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>230 592 2.57</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>230 695 3.02</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>230 741 3.22</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>230 592 2.57</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>230 695 3.02</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>230 741 3.22</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>230 592 2.57</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 showed that all items have mean scores above the mean cut off point. This implies that all items are the conflict management strategies adopted in public secondary schools in Awka South Local Government Area for conflict resolutions.

Summary of Findings
Based on the data analyzed, it was found that:

1. The causes of principal-teacher conflicts include, among others: principal’s indifference to teachers’ problems; poor communication in the school; role ambiguity or lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities; issuing of queries to teachers by the principal; lack of recognition of teachers’ efforts by principal; poor condition of service; and principal’s high-handedness in school administration.

2. The conflict resolution strategies adopted in public secondary schools in Anambra State include: principals’ discussion with teachers before certain decisions are taken; good human relationship between principals and teachers; involvement of school board and PTA members for school administration; and mediation (involving both parties in discussing how best to resolve existing conflict).

Discussion
Research question 1 sought the causes of conflicts between principals and teachers. It
revealed that the causes of principal-teacher conflicts include, among others: principal’s indifference to teachers’ problems; poor communication in the school; role ambiguity or lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities; issuing of queries to teachers by the principal; lack of recognition of teachers’ efforts by principal; poor condition of service; and principal’s high-handedness in school administration. The findings are in line with those of Nwangwu and Chidiobi (2014) and Walton and Datton (2015). These conflicts causing agents not only negatively affects the principals’ and teachers’ work roles and exchange relationship, but teaching and learning as well. These elements equally create fear, pressure and resentment in teachers and prevent them from sharing innovative ideas and being committed to school activities. Therefore, school principals should explore areas that will enhance good working relationship between them and the teachers for improvement in teachers’ job performance.

The second research question sought conflict management strategies adopted on schools for conflict resolutions. The research finding supports the work of Kalagbor, Levi Doe, Nnokam, NyegeChinda (2015), that both principals and teachers are familiar with some conflict management strategies. Also, the finding is similar to the finding of Handy (2004), that principals’ discussion with teachers before certain decisions are taken; good human relationship between principals and teachers; involvement of school board and PTA members for school administration; and mediation are some of the conflict management strategies adopted in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This suggests that principals and teachers should improve on the existing strategies they have been using for much more effective result.

Conclusion
Conflicts and crisis in school management have diverse causes which vary with places and times; the effects can be negative and/or positive depending on how they are managed. Notably, the explanatory relevance of the different theories that offer explanations on the causes of conflicts and crises in the area of school management largely depend on the contexts and circumstances. In other words, as schools and the management authorities are different, so are the causes of the associated conflicts and crisis. Accordingly, the strategies for avoiding or resolving the conflicts and crisis also vary with places and times. But the findings of this research led the researchers to conclude that conflict is inevitable in any organizational setup and thus, public secondary schools in Awka South Local Government Area is not an exception.

Recommendations
Upon the findings of this research work, the following recommendations were made:

1. The appropriate authorities, school principals, and teachers should ensure that there are Teachers Representative Councils (TRC), established for the management of conflict in the school. This will help reduce and check any form of biased tendency and as well create the spirit of peaceful coexistence and teamwork.

2. The school management should determine suitable ways of dealing with conflicts in the educational sector and government ministries especially the ministry of education as it relates to principals and teachers in order to improve the education standard of our nation.

3. The principal should understand the cause of conflict in the school system and use appropriate strategies to eliminate or ameliorate the situation.
IGBOKWE, AKUDO & UGWU: Principal – Teacher Conflict and Management Strategies in Secondary Schools in Awka South Local Government Area

References


