CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES OF NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS’ ADMINISTRATORS FOR PEACE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

It is quite obvious that education is the bedrock of social progress and economic development of any nation in the world. The study empirically examined the strategies adopted by secondary school principals in Cross River State of Nigeria in resolving conflicts and sustaining peace and economic development. Descriptive survey research design was adopted. A sample of 100 public secondary schools administrators was randomly drawn from a population of 253 public secondary schools in the state. An instrument tagged “Conflict Resolution Strategy Questionnaire (CRSQ)” was used for data collection. Frequency table, percentages and t-test statistics were used to analyze the data collected in order to answer one research question and test two hypotheses at .05 level of significance respectively. The findings of the study include that secondary school administrators adopted conciliation; competitive; yielding and co-operative strategies in resolving conflicts in their schools, while the avoidance and forcing strategies were rarely used by schools administrators. It was therefore, recommended among others that, school administrators should be properly trained in the art of peace education and conflict resolution strategies particularly in the mediation and arbitration techniques.

Education has always been the bedrock and the launching pad of national development. It is the quality of education a country provides that determines her

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level of national development. It is well recognized all over the world that peace and security of life and property are the primary condition for progress and development of any society (Arase and Iwuofor, 2007). Regrettably, Nigeria as an African state is bedeviled with ethno-religious conflict and crises.

It has been noticed that conflicting situations arise from differences in ethnicity, ideology, beliefs, perception, interest, philosophies and aims as well as opinions. This implies that conflict exist wherever incompatible activities take place such that benefits to one side come out at the expense of the other. This was butted by Omgu (2010:31) who asserted that; Ethno-religious and socio-political conflicts arise from the absence of tolerance in the ethnic, religious, cultural and political spheres among various social groups that make up Nigeria.

It is quite obvious that the human resources of any organization (school) consist of people with diverse cultural, religious, social, political and economic background. This shows their attitude to work, temperament and frame of reference which certainly makes their control often complex for the administrators. These differences ultimately, leaders to clash of interest among the personnel, which if not effectively managed, could degenerate into serious conflict situation.

If education is to be managed effectively for sustainable peace and economic development in Nigeria, then education of the post primary level should be managed free of crisis/conflict. Some variables like experience, sex, etc have been observed to influence the overall administrative effectiveness of school administrators (Udida, 2001). Peace is a conscious or deliberate effort which may be required to inculcate the attitude and skills of peace and peaceful coexistence for the sustenance of the culture in a diverse and conflict prone society like Nigeria (Gumut, 2004).

It is therefore emphasized that Nigeria and other African states adopt and strengthen existing strategies of peace education both formally or informally, to expand the opportunities of living in harmony and reduce the threats of conflicts.

Conflict could be useful as a springboard of culture and peace if effectively managed. According to Abdulrahman (2001), conflict is a part of life, after a part of growth and change, as we can live with it, learn it, make choices and seek to transform it in a creative way; or we can live in it and allow it to undermine objectives or become destructive. This shows that whether or not conflict would play a significant role in human relations that would depend on the manner such conflict is managed.
This is why Ubi (2007) asserted that conflicts are part and parcel of man’s existence. He further emphasized that disagreements among people are natural as people must disagree to agree and conversely it becomes logical that they should agree to disagree. This implies that such agreement or disagreement to agree, does not in themselves, constitute conflict. This attest to the fact that developed nations are not those that are conflict-free, but those that have on ground, structures and personnel for the effective management of conflict or crisis.

Conflict could arise among staff in a school setting, between staff and management, students and staff, or even between the school and the host community. The secondary and tertiary school systems in Nigeria, for example, have witnessed a lot of conflicts, ostensibly due to the divergent role perceptions of government and the various unions. Conflicts are bound to occur and to be resolved in any organization like a school. It is worthy to note that if conflicts are not properly resolved or managed, it may be difficult to achieve the objectives of the school as all activities therein would be highly jeopardized. The extent, to which a conflict is resolved depends upon the extent to which the parties to the conflict perceive their negotiated gains and loses during bargaining to be relatively equitable (Omoluabi, 1995). Since school administrators must live with conflicts, inter-group, interpersonal, ethnocentric and so on, the best technique and attitude an effective and efficient school administrator should have towards it is to reorganize its inevitability in the work place and develop an understanding of the strategies of managing, minimizing and resolving it. The ability and credibility to manage and resolve conflict in any school depends on the experience of the school administrator. An experienced school administrator is one who has put in over five years in service as a chief executive of a school and has the knowledge and understanding that is gained by doing certain things or living with people. On the other hand, an inexperienced school administrator is one who has put in less than five years in service as a school principal and has no adequate knowledge and understanding gained from doing certain things and living with people.

When conflict manifest in an organization like a school, it calls for conflict resolution. There are some of these conflict resolution strategies such as conciliation, competitive, yielding, co-operative, avoidance and forcing strategy that a school administrator could adapt in resolving crisis.

Conflict resolution therefore, is the process or method of facilitating interpersonal communication to get parties to a conflict to reduce the differences in their ideals and views through arbitration, bargaining and negotiation. According to Bannon and Paul (2003), conflict resolution can be thought to encompass the use of
non-violent resistance measures by conflicting parties as an attempt to promote effective resolution.

There are many empirical works on conflicts resolution in the areas of industrial organizations, much of such work has not been done in the educational sector despite the existing conflict situations in Nigerian schools. It is against this background that the researchers deem it fit to embark on this study, to investigate how Nigerian secondary school administrators resolve conflict to enhance peace and economic development.

Literature Review

It is obvious that whenever two or more individuals are engaged in a formal organization like the secondary school system in Cross River State this conflicting situation emanating from differences/disagreement often leads to quarrels, controversies, disputes, destruction of lives and property to the extent of impeding the achievement of the goals of secondary school education as enshrined in the National Policy on Education.

However, when conflict occurs in the school, it calls for conflict resolution. This could be done tactfully by means of conciliation, competition, yielding, cooperation, avoidance and forcing strategies. The conciliation or compromising strategy is simply an approach to resolve conflict whereby, each party gets half of its demands and loses others for peace to reign. This style can be considered as an extension of both yielding and cooperative strategies (Ike, 2012). The competitive strategy has to do with the principal or any other party maximizing individual assertiveness and minimizing empathy on the other party. It is an all-out ‘win or lose’ approach. The yielding or accommodating strategy is a style of having low concern for one’s own self and simply allowing the other party to win in the interest of peace by obliging its agitation (Bercovitch and Jackson, 2009).

Cooperative or collaboration strategy is another style that is above all others and has to do with the ‘win-win’ approach in which each party to a conflict wins by becoming a problem solver and a collaborating conflict participant (Ike, 2012). The avoidance strategy is one in which the administrator withdraws or waits and see with the hope that it is not disruptive or that the situation will eventually resolve itself in time. Ike (2012) stated that it is characterized by inaction and passivity as well allows problems to foster out of control. Forcing strategy has to do with the administrator imposing his/her own decision on the parties involved, and thereby countering effectiveness and the problem – solving component that enhance effectiveness (Magaji, 2002).
Conflict Resolution Strategies of Nigerian Secondary Schools’ Administrators for Peace and Economic Development

It is certain that qualitative education can only thrive in an atmosphere devoid of chaos and rancour. Peace education is an attempt to educate children and adults in the dynamics of conflicts and the promotion of peace-making skills in homes, schools and communities throughout the world, using all the channels and instruments of socialization (Gumut, 2004). Peace is often considered as the fundamental basis of sustainability in human societies. Ibeanu (2004) perceived peace as a process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict both with specific societies and in the overall international community. Peace is a necessary ingredient in the survival and development of societies.

Statement of the Problem

In recent times, there have been brutal killing of 42 pupils in Borno State and 50 students in Yobe State, kidnapping of both staff and students in various schools across the nation, incessant strike action by various unions in Nigeria schools which are great impediments to academic progress and economic development of Nigeria. Regrettably, the Northern States in Nigeria have shown that security of persons and property is still far from being realizable. Worse still, primary and secondary schools in Cross River State have been on strike between the 9th of September and 20th of October, 2013 due to disagreement between Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) and the state government. These account for the reason why a study of this nature becomes essential at least, to identify the strategies adopted by secondary school administrators in Cross River State of Nigeria in resolving conflicts in their schools in order to curb the increasing wave of insurgence/instability in schools in particular and Nigeria as a whole. Specifically, the study examined the extent to which secondary school administrators adopt each of these conflict resolution strategies in resolving conflicts, the extent to which gender and managerial experience affect principals’ usage of conflict resolution strategies.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The area of the study was Cross River State of Nigeria. The population of the study comprised of 253 public secondary school principals, out of which a sample of 100 respondents was randomly selected. An instrument tagged “Conflict Resolution Strategy Questionnaire” (CRSQ) was developed by the researchers for data collection. It was face-validated by experts of Educational Management, Measurement and Evaluation in Federal College of Education, Obudu in Cross River State.

The reliability of the instrument was done through test-re-test method in Benue State. Thirty principals of secondary schools were used for this pilot study. Using a Cronbach Alpha Formular, a reliability coefficient index of 0.86 was obtained.
and considered to be reliable. The 24-item instrument had two parts. Part “A” elicited demographic data of the respondents such as gender, educational qualification, and administrative experience of the respondents. Part “B” was made-up of the different types of conflict resolution strategies. The questionnaires were administered on the sampled 100 secondary school administrators by the researchers directly and retrieved within 24 hours. Only 96 copies were retrieved while 4 copies were un-recovered. The data collected was analyzed using frequency counts, percentages and t-test statistics.

Research Question 1
One research question was formulated to guide the study as stated below:
What are the strategies adopted by secondary schools’ administrators in resolving conflict in Cross River State?

Research Hypotheses
To further guide the study, two null hypotheses were postulated as follows:

$H_01$: The experience of the school administrator does not have significant influence on the type of strategies adopted in conflict resolution in Cross River State Secondary Schools.

$H_02$: Conflict resolution strategies of secondary school administrators do not significantly depend on sex of the principal.

Results
The results of the analysis are presented below:

**Table 1: Strategies Adopted by Secondary Schools Administrators in Resolving Conflicts in their schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Strategies Adopted</th>
<th>Frequently Adopted</th>
<th>Rarely Adopted</th>
<th>Never Adopted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Conciliation Strategy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making conciliations when setting disputes</td>
<td>63(66%)</td>
<td>33(34%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>as well.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Persuading all sides to make conciliations</td>
<td>75(78%)</td>
<td>21(22%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Ensuring mutual give and take interactions</td>
<td>72(78%)</td>
<td>24(25%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Encouraging all parties to admit blames</td>
<td>88(92%)</td>
<td>08(8%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and accept praises accordingly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ambrose Belue Anashe and Veronica Kulo
Conflict Resolution Strategies of Nigerian Secondary Schools’ Administrators for Peace and Economic Development

**Avoidance Strategy**

5. Discouraging staff and students from unnecessary arguments - 40(42%) 56(58%)
6. Treating staff and students equally - 32(33%) 64(67%)
7. Stopping squabbles at the initial stage before it aggravates - 60(63%) 36(37.5%)
8. Adopting a ‘wait and see’ attitude 71(74%) 25(26%)

**Competitive Strategy**

9. Permitting cross-examination by both parties involved 82(85%) 14(15%) -
10. Allowing collective resolutions to solving all controversial issues 76(79%) 29(21%) -
11. Permitting each group to make satisfactory suggestions to solving the problems at stake 74(77%) 22(23%) -
12. Encouraging both parties to see conflict as a ‘win or lose’ issue 68(71%) 28(29%) -

**Yielding/Accommodating Strategy**

13. Encouraging high concern for others and low concern for oneself 79(82%) 17(18%) -
14. Playing down disputing issues among staff and students 81(84%) 15(16%) -
15. Discouraging issues that lead to disagreement among staff and students 86(90%) 10(10%) -
16. Setting grievances by bringing up ideas that have similarities to both groups 78(8%) 18(19%) -

**Cooperative Strategy**

17. Ensuring mutual outcomes interest to both parties 88(92%) 08(8%) -
18. Making both parties to see conflict as a creative opportunity. 92(75%) 24(25%) -
19. Encouraging both parties involved to invest time and resources to finding a victorious solution 82(85%) 14(15%) -
20. Emphasizing on views or efforts to finding amicable solutions to please all parties involved 76(79%) 20(21%) -
Forcing Strategy
21. Imposing personal decision on both parties  26(27%)  70(72%)
22. Expecting both parties to adhere strictly to directives given not minding the consequence  22(23%)  74(77%)
23. Permitting each party to suggest satisfactory solution to the problem.  16(17%)  80(83%)
24. Meting out punitive measure to any of the party who fail to adhere to directives given.  04(4%)  92(65%)

Table 1 shows how secondary schools administrators resolve conflict or crisis in their school for sustainability of peace and economic development. Analytically, the table reveals that the conciliation strategy; competitive strategy; yielding strategy and cooperation strategy are adopted either more frequently or rarely in resolving conflicts in their various schools as evident in frequency or percentage of their responses. On other hand, the school administrators’ responses indicate that they never or rarely use the avoidance strategy and the forcing strategy in resolving conflicts in their schools.

Hypothesis 1
The experience of the school administrators does not have significant influence on the type of strategies adopted in conflict resolution in Cross River State secondary schools.

Table 1: Independence t-test of Experienced and Inexperienced Secondary School Administrators in the Choice of Conflict Resolution Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t-cal</th>
<th>t-crit.</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience administrators</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inexperienced administrators</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The t-calculated value of 2.62 is more than t-critical value of 2.01 at .05 level of significance with 94 degree of freedom. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. From the analysis presented in table 2, it implies that experience has a significant influence on the type or choice of strategies adopted by secondary school administrators in resolving conflicts in their schools.
Hypothesis 2
Conflict resolution strategies of secondary school administrators do not significantly depend on sex of the principal.

Table 3: T-test Analysis of Male and Female Administrators in the Usage of Conflict Resolution Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t-cal</th>
<th>t-crit.</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male administrators</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>Not Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female administrators</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results in table 3 shows that the t-calculated value of 1.76 is less than the critical value of 2.01 at .05 level of significance with 94 degree of freedom. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted or retained. This therefore implies that conflicts resolution strategies of secondary school administrators does not depend on the sex of the principal. This means there is no significant difference between the conflict resolution strategies adopted by both male and female secondary school administrators.

Discussion of Results
Findings of the study include that secondary school administrators use many and different strategies in resolving conflicts that evolve in their schools. It is quite obvious now that these school administrators adopt the conciliation strategy, competition strategy, yielding strategy and cooperative strategy more frequently than any other strategy in resolving conflicts in their schools this is empirically evident in the responses that shows 66%, 78%, 75% and 92% respectively for the four items in the conciliation strategy cluster which school administrators adopts in resolving conflicts in their schools, while 34%, 22%, 25% and 8% of the responses of the respondents shows that they rarely or once in a while adopt the conciliation strategy in conflict resolution in their schools. This finding corroborates with the assertion of Hicks (2011) that accepting some demands put forth by others, compromisers believe this agreeableness will encourage others to meet half way, thus promoting conflict resolution.

Secondly, secondary school administrators either rarely or never adopt avoidance strategy as shown in response items 5-8 with 42%, 33%, 62.5% and 74% respectively indicating that the rarely use avoidance strategy and 58%, 67%, 37.5%
and 26% indicating no usage of avoidance strategy to resolving conflicts. This supports the view of Ike (2012) that by neglecting to address high-conflict situations avoiders risk allowing problems to foster out of control. This is why public secondary school administrators do not use the strategy in resolving conflict.

The findings also include that the competitive strategy is frequently adopted by most school administrators in resolving conflict in their schools as indicated in their response to items 9-12 with 85%, 79%, 77% and 71% respectively. Though, a few of them indicated that they rarely use the competitive strategy as shown in their response to items 9-12 of 15%, 21%, 23% and 29% respectively. The usage of this strategy by most school administrators according to the finding corroborates with views of Wilmot and Joyce (2007) that the strategy involves open exchange of views that leads to satisfactory solution to resolving conflicts.

Another finding of the study also showed that yielding or accommodating strategy is frequently used by most public secondary school administrators in resolving conflict in their schools. This is evidence in their responses, to items 13-16 with 82%, 84%, 90% and 81% respectively of items indicating that they adopt the yielding strategy frequently in resolving conflicts in schools. This agrees with Bercovitch and Jackson (2009) that it simply allows the other party to win in the interest of peace by obliging its agitation.

The use of cooperative strategy is also popular among the public secondary school administrators in resolving conflict in their schools. This is shown in their responses to items 17-20 with 92%, 25%, 85% and 79% respectively, while a few of them rarely adopt the strategy as shown by 8%, 25%, 15% and 21% of them respectively, the option of the use of this strategy by most of them agrees with Ike (2012) who emphasized that this strategy is above all others and has to do with each party to a conflict wins by becoming a problem solver and a collaborative conflict participant.

The study shows that forcing conflict resolution strategy is not popular or frequent used among public secondary schools. Administrators following items 21-24, in the instrument for data collection, 73%, 77%, 83% and 92% of them respectively indicates that they never use forcing strategy to resolve conflicts in their schools. While 27%, 23%, 17% and 4% of them respectively rarely use the strategy to resolve conflicts. This implies that majority of the principals do not impose their decision on the other parties to aggravate issues. This finding is inline with Mogaji (2002) that the forcing strategy counters effectiveness and that the problem-solving component enhanced effectiveness. It is quite obvious that conflicts are best resolve not by forcing a party to succumb to threats but by adopting constructive dialogue, objectivity and transparency.
Conflict Resolution Strategies of Nigerian Secondary Schools’ Administrators for Peace and Economic Development

The study further reveals that, experience of the school administrators have a significant influence on the type of strategy adopted in conflict resolution, as there is a significant difference between experienced and inexperienced administrators. This finding corroborates with the observation of Udida (2001) that experience influences the overall administrative effectiveness of school administrators.

Furthermore, the study also reveals that conflict resolution strategies of secondary school administrators do not significantly depend on sex of the principal. The study therefore shows that resolution strategies adopted by administrators of public secondary schools are the same irrespective of sex. This finding disagrees with the observation of Udida (2001), that sex influences the overall administrative effectiveness of an administrator. This implies that to be able to adopt a unique method of conflict resolution and create a conducive atmosphere for the sustainability of peace and economic development.

Conclusion

From the findings of the study, conflicts abounds in every organization (school) and that as long as human beings interact, conflict will continue to occur. However, when conflict occurs, it must be resolved. It therefore depends on the awareness and dexterity of the school administrator to use appropriate strategies in resolving conflicts.

The findings of the study revealed that secondary school administrators adopted conciliation; competitive; yielding and cooperative strategies in resolving conflicts in their schools, while the avoidance and forcing strategies were rarely or never used by school administrators. It also found that experience of the school administrators can influence the choice of strategy adopted for resolving conflicts, while conflict resolution strategies adopted by school administrators is not determined or influenced by the sex of the administrators.

Recommendations

The findings of this study are relevant to policy makers, education planners and school administrators. It is therefore recommended that:

1. School administrators should be properly trained in the art of peace education and conflict resolution strategies particularly in the mediation and arbitration techniques.
2. Secondary School Administrators, irrespective of gender, experience and qualification should see conflict as integral to the school environment.
3. Training of secondary school teachers in educational management and conflict resolution strategies before appointment as principals should be made mandatory criterion.
References


