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Principal's Personal Characteristics and Conflict Management in Kwara State Secondary Schools, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper is a report on a study on the influence of principal's personal characteristics on conflict management in Kwara State secondary schools. It is a descriptive survey carried out ex-post facto. Five hundred principals and teachers were randomly selected as respondents from senior secondary schools in Kwara State. A Researcher designed instrument tagged: "Principal's Personal Characteristics and Conflict Management Questionnaire" (PPCCMQ) was used to collect relevant information from the respondents. The instrument was validated by six experts from the Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria and subjected to test re-test technique to ascertain reliability coefficient value of 0.78. Four research hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to test the research hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The finding of the study indicated that a significant relationship existed between principal's personal characteristics and conflict management in Kwara State secondary schools (calculated r-value =0.782 > critical r-value 0.195, $p \leq 0.05$, df = 498). On this note, it was recommended, among others, that principal

should understand the cause of conflict in the school system and use appropriate strategies to ameliorate the situation based on personal characteristics.

Keywords: Personal Characteristics, Conflict Management, Secondary Schools

Introduction

A leader is presumed to have the knowledge, skill and experience in the activities engaged in by the group led by him, and of course, he has the authority and power which makes members of the groups accord him respect, obedience and honour. Aderonmu and Aina (2008) noted that leadership is a force that can initiate action among people, guide activity in a given direction, maintain such activities and unite efforts towards common goals. Therefore, leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives (Bass, 1996). Conflict is a situation in which groups or countries have a serious disagreement. It is a situation that perverts individual or groups consciously or unconsciously which may work negatively or positively for achievement of the school policy and set goals. It is obvious that conflict is inevitable, because it develops as a result of dealing with people's lives, jobs, children or students, pride, self-concept, ego and sense of mission or purpose.

According to Okorie (2002) leadership is getting the job done through people. This definition points to two basic ingredients for effective leadership accomplishment. They are getting the job done and influencing others (through people). The personal characteristics of a leader remain essential factors in conflict management in the school system. Age, qualification, marital status and the likes are factors that determine the extent to which a school principal is able to achieve the school goals through effective management of conflict. This paper, therefore, intently examined influence of principal's characteristics on conflict management in Kwara State senior secondary schools, Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

A leader is a person who influences a group of people towards a specific result. Ogbonnia (2007) defined an effective leader as an individual with the capacity to consistently succeed in a given condition and meeting the expectation of an organization or society. Leaders are recognized by their capacity for caring for others and clear communication. Okorie (2002) noted that principal's personal characteristics which include age, marital status, teaching experience, academic qualifications and sex cannot be divulged from the way and manner at which the school is being managed. Ike (2000) submitted that principals' with long year of teaching experience perform better in mobilizing the non-teaching and teaching staff towards attainment of school goals and objectives. Furthermore, Durosaro (1998) opined that the school principal, as a leader must be prepared to integrate roles and personnel to achieve desired goal, the accomplishment of these functions depends solely upon his or her administrative leadership and management skills. The psychological orientation of leadership does influence behaviour within group.

The principal has to ensure that the programme and activities of the school are planned, designed, coordinated and integrated in such a way that the school is able to satisfy the needs of the personnel in the school, the needs and the expectations of the society and meet the educational goals and objectives of the school (Taiwo, 2010). No principal, no matters the level of intelligence or experience can single handedly monitor a school effectively without efforts of the vice-principal and other members of staff. Peretomode (2001) described leadership as the process of providing direction and influencing individuals to achieve goals. Ogunsaju (1997) opined that leadership in the schools is the influencing of actions, behaviours, beliefs, and feelings of staff and pupils. More so, leadership is the ability to get others to willingly follow a course of action. Every organization needs leader's personal characteristics in order to achieve stated goals and objectives.

Conflict is a tension between two or more social entities (individuals, groups or large organizations) that arise from incompatibility of actual and desired responses. Conflicts have become part and parcel of human organizations world over. This indeed is a paradox because of the amount of energy and resources expensed by organizations to prevent and resolve conflicts. Flippo (1999) attempted an explanation when he remarked that a total absence of conflict would be unbelievable, boring, and a strong indication that conflicts are being suppressed. The inevitability of conflict was also established by Kerzner (2001) that conflict is part of change and therefore inevitable. The nature and type of conflicts that occur in an organization vary from one organization to the others. The common types of conflicts that arise in schools include the one between the students on one hand and the school authority on the other. Other forms of conflict include interpersonal conflicts among staff and as well as the students.

In relating conflict with the society, Fayeye (1994) asserted that, the conflict perspective assumes that social behaviour is best understood in terms of conflicts, or tension among competing groups. Sociologists and other social scientists have come to see conflict not merely as a class phenomenon, but as part of everyday life in all societies. It is, therefore, obvious that in every culture, organization or social group, individuals that form such a social unit will struggle from their respective channels to achieve one goal or the other. One person is bound to suffer, while one person will benefit, and an individual will attempt to dominate at the expense of others "competition" and conflict place confusion on people's understanding and perception that they are taken as a similar concept. Competition usually brings out the best in people, as they strive to be top in their field. Several types of conflicts identified in the schools according to Abubakar (2005) are student-staff conflict, student-student conflict, student-principal conflict and community- school conflict.

Conflict can, therefore, be seen as the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals. Schools have traditionally been expected to teach children academic skills. Schools are also places where students interact with one another, their teachers, and educational administrator. Many educators believe student behaviour affects academic achievement; therefore, negative behaviour has always been a concern to educators. Disciplinary practices include various forms

of punishment based on the assumption that if negative behaviours are eliminated, the classroom climate will be conducive to learning. Many models of traditional discipline include building positive rapport with students to reduce negative interactions. "Logical" or "natural" consequences are used to extinguish negative behaviour when it arises (Canter and Canter, 1992).

Albert (2001) stated that conflicts may be caused by competition for inadequate resources, contradicting value system, psychological needs of group and individuals, manipulation of information and perception. Conflict is part of a school because teachers have varying ideas about issues, they have different backgrounds and their experiences are different. These differences can cause so much damage to the school if they are not well managed; hence the importance of conflict resolution strategies to schools administrators. School' administrators are managers and they should be able to manage conflict effectively rather than suppress or avoid them. In managing conflicts, it is pertinent to know the causes of such conflicts and the influence it will have on the school system. Methods of resolving conflict include compromising, accommodating, collaborating, avoiding and competing (Folger, Poole and Stutman, 1997).

Methodology

The study was a descriptive survey carried out ex-post factor. Five hundred principals and teachers were randomly selected as respondents from senior secondary schools in Kwara State. A researcher designed instrument titled: "Principal's Personal Characteristics and Conflicts Management Questionnaire" (PPCCMQ) was used to collect relevant information from the respondents. The instrument was validated by six experts from the Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria and subjected to test re-test technique to ascertain reliability coefficient value of 0.78. Data gathered from the respondents on principal's personal characteristics and conflict management were statistically analyzed using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to test the research hypotheses formulated in the study at 0.05 level of significance.

Research Hypotheses

Ho$_1$: There is no significant relationship between principals' personal characteristics and conflict management in secondary schools.

Ho$_2$: There is no significant relationship between principal's qualification and conflict management in secondary schools.

Ho$_3$: There is no significant relationship between principal's teaching experience and conflict management in secondary schools.

Ho$_4$: There is no significant relationship between principals' sex and conflict management in secondary schools.

Results and Discussion

Results

Ho$_1$: There is no significant relationship between principal's personal characteristics and conflict management in secondary schools.

Table 1

Principal's personal characteristics and conflict management

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	Calculated r-value	Critical r-value	Decision
Principals' personal characteristics	500	7.17	8.45				
				498	.782	.195	Ho Rejected
Conflict management	500	29.32	13.17				

From Table 1, the calculated r-value (.782) is greater than the critical r-value (.195) at .05 level of significance for 498 degrees of freedom. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that a significant relationship existed between principal's personal characteristics and conflict management.

Ho$_2$: There is no significant relationship between principal's qualification and conflict management in secondary schools.

Table 2

Principal's qualification and conflict management

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	Calculated r-value	Critical r-value	Decision
Principals' qualification	500	7.19	8.49				
				498	.785	.195	Ho Rejected
Conflict management	500	29.32	13.17				

The results in Table 2 showed that the calculated r-value (.785) is greater than the critical r-value (.195) at .05 level of significance for 498 degrees of freedom. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that a significant relationship existed between principal's qualification and conflict management.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between principal's teaching experience and conflict management in secondary schools.

Table 3

Principal's teaching experience and conflict management

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	Calculated r-value	Critical r-value	Decision
Principals' teaching experience	500	7.20	8.50				
				498	.790	.195	Ho Rejected
Conflict management	500	29.32	13.17				

As shown in Table 3, the calculated r-value (.790) is greater than the critical r-value (.195) at .05 level of significance for 498 degrees of freedom. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This denotes that a significant relationship existed between principal's teaching experience and conflict management.

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between principals' sex and conflict management in secondary schools.

Table 4

Principal's sex and conflict management

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	Calculated r-value	Critical r-value	Decision
Principals' sex	500	7.25	8.59				
				498	.790	.195	Ho Rejected
Conflict management	500	29.32	13.17				

From Table 4, the calculated r-value (.790) is greater than the critical r-value (.195) at .05 level of significance for 498 degrees of freedom. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that a significant relationship existed between principal's sex and conflict management.

Discussion

As shown in Table 1, a significant relationship existed between principals' personal characteristics and conflict management in secondary schools. Principal's sex, qualification and teaching experience have direct bearing on how conflict is managed in the school system.

According to Beggy (2003) conflict is part and parcel of the school and the school cannot shy away from it, because it is experienced daily in the teaching and learning process. It is demanded of the principal to use his personal characteristics to proffer plausible solutions to grievances that emanate as a result of conflict among the school personnel so that the school goals and objectives will not be hindered. Maleke (2003) also pointed out that the smooth running or failure of a school is attributed to the principal's personal characteristics. Vivar (2006) stressed that it is critical to select the appropriate approach for each conflict situation as different strategies may lead to different outcomes. From Table 2, principal's qualification is a good determinant of how he or she manages conflict in the school system. Yolk (2010) concluded that principals with higher qualifications tend to perform better in conflict management in the school system.

As indicated in Table 3, principal's teaching experience can be traced to the way conflict is managed in the school in order to achieve the school goals and objectives. Bass (2003) submitted that principals with longer teaching experience perform better than their colleagues when it comes to resolving conflicts within the school. Based on the result in Table 4, a significant relationship existed between principal's sex and conflict management in secondary schools. Likert (1999) submitted that male principals perform more efficiently and effectively in conflict management in an organization than female counterparts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is no gain saying the fact that conflict management anywhere in the world remains a veritable tool for peace. Society itself is conflict-inherent, the school is no exemption. Since conflict is inevitable and the school manager is aware of it, its management is highly dependent on his or her personal characteristics. Conflict, by its nature, changes over time, whenever a group cannot accomplish set goals or complete a task, the group members' experience frustrations, then those involve may perceive that conflict exists and formulate ideas about the conflict issue. Conflict is a dynamic process. In any organization, a modest amount of conflict can be useful in increasing organizational effectiveness. Leadership effectiveness is a function of the personality or style of the leader, the behaviour of the leader, the maturity and expectation of the subordinates and other elements internal and external to the situation. Therefore, conflict can be managed based on the principal's personal characteristics in secondary school. The principal should understand the cause of conflict in the school system and use appropriate strategies to ameliorate the situation based on personal characteristics. The principal should identify areas he/she is more effective and employ such areas to resolve conflict in the school system.

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