
SCHOOL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES FOR IMPROVED TEACHERS JOB PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVER STATE

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Abstract

The study aimed to determine the effectiveness of school conflict management techniques in improving teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in River State. A descriptive survey design was used, with a self-designed questionnaire titled the School Conflict Management Techniques Questionnaire (SCMTQ) used for data collection. The study involved 6,893 teachers from 286 public secondary schools in River State, with a sample size of 378 respondents. The results showed that accommodating techniques had the highest influence on male and female teachers in urban and rural areas, followed by compromising, competing, collaborating, and avoiding techniques. The study also found a significant mean score difference in the influence of conflict management techniques on teachers' job performance. Based on these findings, recommendations were made for improving conflict management practices in public secondary schools.

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Introduction

Conflict is commonly refers to, some form of friction, disagreement, or discord arising within a group, when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group. For Chrispino in Valente et. al (2020) conflict is defined as a clash between individuals arising out of differences in interpreting an event, thought, process, attitudes, understanding and interests. It may also be defined as a disagreement through which the parties involved perceive a threat to their needs, interests or concerns. One common thing among these definitions is that consideration is not given to an individual; the thought struggle within a person to get something done in a certain way. That is the conflicting decision within the individual. Thus, the term conflict may be viewed as any situation whereby there are incompatible goals, cognitions, or emotions within an individual or between individuals or groups that is capable of causing opposition or antagonistic interaction. There are three key elements in this definition: goals, cognitions and emotions. Goal here means an incompatible outcome or result (a situation where the outcome of something is not accepted by others); cognitive conflict exists when ideas or thoughts are inconsistent; and affective conflict has to do with feelings or emotions not been compatible.

Conflict can take place anywhere. High in the heavens, deep in the sea, on land, and in any given organization. In fact, conflict can be found anywhere there is benefiting

interest, goals to be achieved, resources to be managed, positions to be occupied, decisions to be made, values to protect, opinions to hold, needs and differences in belief system. However, in this study, the focus is on school conflict.

School is a place where formal teaching and learning takes place. Ohaka (2017) defined a school as the aspect of the society that engages in the character molding of the child, development of the knowledge of the child and skill training of the child through conscious guidance and supervision. The school is a corporate environment where learning and teaching strives. The school is one place where clashes of ideas about tasks and projects among individuals cannot be avoided. In the opinion of Ghaffar (2019), conflict presently continues to be a factor in academic life. Conflict is thus a fundamental human and social trait. A completely conflict free harmonious society is impossible. In this regards, Karen and Fleetwood in Ghaffar (2019) suggested that since conflict is seemingly unavoidable, particularly in a scholarly setting, it is obviously necessary for administrators to be able to recognize conflict, to view its constructive as well as destructive potential, to learn how to manage conflict, and to apply conflict management strategies in a practical way.

Conflict in school is said to occur when one party perceives the action of another party as encumbering the opportunity for the attainment of a goal (Ohaka, 2017). School conflict is defined by Valente et. al (2020) as the disagreement between individuals or groups regarding ideas, interests, principles, and values within the school community, perceiving their interests as excluded.

Teachers are individuals with academic qualification and competence in a specialized field who consciously and meticulously causes a much-needed transformation in the learning abilities, attitudes and skills of the learners. Ohaka (2017) considered the teacher as one who consciously attempts to mold character, transfers knowledge and develops desirable skills in another; in fact, the teacher influences expected change in behavior that result in learning experiences. The teachers' related conflicts are those disruptions, capable of undermining teachers' job performance. These are mainly caused by lack of communication between colleagues and school authority, personal interests, previous conflicts, issues of position and power, political and ideological differences. For Plunkett and Raymond in Ghaffar (2019), the possible sources of conflict are poor communication, competition for common but scarce resources, incompatible goals and the like. In the assertion of Ohaka (2017), the intrinsic, egocentric, raucous, vociferous, high-handed and domineering nature of some members of the school community could always cause conflict in school, thus, making it increasingly inevitable. Furthermore, Isabu (2017) stressed that limited resources, poor communication, overlapping authority, problems of role incompatibility, role ambiguity arise from inadequate or inappropriate role definition in the school system and inequitable treatment can be a significant cause of conflict. Thus, Ohaka (2017: 6) went further to highlight possible causes of conflict as follows; Relatively unfavorable or favorable administrative policies.

Individual indifferences in the co-existent, followership and leadership abilities of the students and/or teachers.

Personality traits or psychological make ups.

Discontentment in the amount of salaries and wages or poor remuneration.

Riots and violent protests.
Quest for power, dominance and political struggle.
Family background and cultural differences.
Unfavorable learning environment or conditions
Oppression, bullying, dictatorship and victimization by the superior staff.
Inadequate training and re-training on effective conflict and conflict management strategies.
Poor classroom management.
Inability to meet up with personal basic needs.
Inequitable reward structure and distribution of resources amongst staff.

Conflict management simply means strategies and approaches of containing (managing the conflict) as well as to strategies and approaches of resolving it. To Ohaka (2017), conflict management is that which deals with those positively effective pre-containment and post-containment approaches towards the handling of conflict between groups or a group. In a related opinion, Moran in Ghaffar (2019) considered conflict management as “a philosophy and a set of skills that assist individuals and groups in better understanding and dealing with conflict as it arises in all aspects of their lives.

Conflicts related to teachers could have a devastating effect on learning if not properly managed. In the view of Ghaffar (2019), it could hamper productivity, lowers morale, causes more and continued conflicts and causes inappropriate behaviors. In the same vein, Tingley (n.d) noted that students are badly caught in the middle when there is conflict involving the teachers. More so, Benoliel (2017) noted that though conflict is a normal and natural part of any workplace, it can lead to absenteeism, lost productivity, and mental health issues, but at the same time, conflict can be a motivator that generates new ideas and innovation as well as leads to increased flexibility and a better understanding of working relationships. However, there is much and urgent need for school conflict management in order to contribute to the success of organizations. The aim of school conflict management according to Ohaka (2017) is to provide a conducive teaching and learning environment free of turmoil. Similarly, Shanka and Thuo (2017) noted that effective conflict management takes central stage in creating safer and more supportive school learning environments.

Some techniques that principals and school administrators can use when confronting conflict related to teachers in the opinion of Tingley (n.d) include: focus on the problem, to find solution not on the personalities; be courteous; keep conversations or decisions strictly confidential; rather than impose a resolution, allow the participants to come up with one together and make it clear that one expects improvement and will monitor progress. Armstrong in Ohaka (2017) on his part suggested exposition, preventing interaction, structuring and personal counseling as the techniques to manage conflict. In exposition, the conflicting situation in school has to be exposed as that could be the only true process to ensure that the issues that caused the conflicts in the organization are explored and resolved. *Preventing interaction* is applied when emotions are high and it involves keeping the conflicting parties apart in the hope that although the differences still exist, the people involved will have time to cool down and consider more constructive approaches. *Structuring technique* is used when it is not possible to separate the parties in which case the forms of interactions are

structured. *Personal counseling in the idea of Armstrong*, in Ohaka (2017) do not address the conflict itself but focuses on how the two people are reacting to the situation. Other techniques highlighted by Ojiji and Shedrack in Ohaka (2017) include problem-solving, communication, negotiation, conciliation, mediation, arbitration and adjudication. However, Benoliel (2017) identified five major techniques of conflict management to include: collaborating, competing, avoiding, accommodating, and compromising.

Collaborating is a combination of being assertive and cooperative. Ghaffar (2019) noted that it is opposite of avoiding and it focuses on satisfying the needs of both parties involved. Those who collaborate attempt to work with others to identify a solution that fully satisfies everyone's concerns.

Competing occurs when the parties involved work for their respective gains at the expense of opposite party. Those who compete are assertive and uncooperative and willing to pursue one's own concerns at another person's expense. Competing inside the same organization do not build good relationships but it could be used against outside organization where outcome is all that matter.

Avoiding is both unassertive and uncooperative because the person involved work neither for his own benefit nor bothers about the other party. This is sometimes considered as best because it works on the principle of leave one alone and when it is right to postpone dealing with the situation that one does not have great concern about the outcome. Those who avoid conflict tend to diplomatically sidestepped an issue or simply withdraw from a threatening situation.

Accommodating is a way of building a relation by trying to carry the other party along despite that one is by way hurt. One who accommodate simply sacrifices and move along with the other. In the assertion of Isabu (2017), accommodation occurs when the goals are compatible, but the interactions are not considered important to overall goal attainment.

Compromising is reached by balancing the demands of the conflicting parties and bargaining in a give and take position to reach a solution. Each party gives up something and also gains something. Benoliel (2017) noted that the technique is aimed to find an expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties in the conflict while maintaining some assertiveness and cooperativeness.

Conflict management techniques may help to clearly defined role for parties to contribute towards the organizational; provide appropriate and proportionate reward to all; build trust and improves communication; calm things situation; reach a solution by compromising; seek better alternatives to resolve issues; in some cases confronting the conflict in order to seek the best solution to the problem and create good working environment for teaching and learning to take place in the school system, with the view of realizing instructional goal. Notwithstanding of the aforementioned, an empirical finding is still necessary to determine the influence of school conflict management techniques on teachers' job performance.

Statement of the Problem

Conflict is inevitable among a group of people of which teachers in public secondary schools are not left out. It could be positive or negative depending on how well it is handled. Many researchers share this sentiment; however, much attention has been given to what causes conflict neglecting how conflict should be effectively

management in an organization. It is on this note that this study is inspired to determine the influence of school conflict management techniques on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Rivers state.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to determine school conflict management techniques for enhancing teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

The influence of school conflict management techniques on male and female teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in River State.

The influence of school conflict management techniques on teachers' job performance in urban and rural public secondary schools in River State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. What is the influence of school conflict management techniques on male and female teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in River State?
- ii. What is the influence of school conflict management techniques on teachers' job performance in urban and rural public secondary schools in River State?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were developed for the study and were tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance:

- i. There is no significant mean score difference on the influence of school conflict management techniques on male and female teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in River State.
- ii. There is no significant mean score difference on the influence of school conflict management techniques on teachers' job performance in urban and rural public secondary schools in River State.

Methodology

Descriptive survey design was used in the study. A self-designed 4-point rating scale questionnaire titled: "School Conflict Management Techniques Questionnaire (SCMTQ)" was used for data collection. The instrument was subjected to validation by experts and tested for internal consistency using Cronbach Alpha which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.72. The population of the study comprised 6,893 teachers in 286 public secondary school in Rivers State: 3,490 males and 3,403 females. The sample size was determined using Yaro Yamene's model to arrive at 378. Proportionate sampling technique was used to distribute the number appropriately to have 191 Males and 187 females. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data and find answers to the research questions, while t-test was used to test the research hypotheses. To agree to any of the research question its grand mean must not

be less than 2.50. Similarly, for any of the null hypothesis to be accepted, the calculated t-value must be less than the critical t-value otherwise rejected.

Results

Research Question 1

What is the influence of school conflict management techniques on male and female teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in River State?

Table 1: Descriptive result of school conflict management techniques on male and female teachers' job performance

S/N	Conflict Management Techniques on Male and Female Teachers	Mean	Std	Decision
1	Collaborating with others in a conflict situation satisfies all concern parties	3.65	0.66	Strongly Agree
2	Competing is a behavior in both male and female teachers	3.68	0.62	Strongly Agree
3	Avoiding technique is more unique in female teachers	2.91	0.44	Agree
4	Accommodating behavior is a typical nature of male teachers	3.74	0.49	Strongly Agree
5	Compromising behavior is not gender bias	3.69	0.59	Strongly Agree
	Grand Mean	3.53	0.56	Strongly Agree

Table 1 show that all the items except item 3 on avoiding were strongly agreed by the respondents. The mean scores ranged between 2.91 and 3.74 and the standard deviation ranged between 0.44 to 0.66, meaning it did not vary much from the mean scores. Also, the grand mean (3.53) was found to be greater than the criteria mean of (2.50) and thus, it was strongly agreed that school conflict management techniques have strong influence on male and female teachers' job performance. Accommodating has the highest influence on male and female public secondary teachers, followed by compromising, competing, collaborating and avoiding technique respectively.

Research Question 2

What is the influence of school conflict management techniques on teachers' job performance in urban and rural public secondary schools in River State?

Table 2: Descriptive result of conflict management techniques on school location.

S/N	Conflict Management Techniques by school Location	Mean	Std	Decision
1	Collaborating	3.04	0.45	Agree
2	Competing	3.12	0.54	Agree
3	Avoiding	2.94	0.54	Agree
4	Accommodating	3.67	0.59	Strongly Agree
5	Compromising	3.66	0.63	Strongly Agree
	Grand Mean	3.28	0.55	Agree

Table 2 show that the grand mean value (3.28) was greater than the criteria value of (2.50). This suggests that school conflict management techniques have influence on teachers' job performance based on school location.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant mean score difference on the influence of school conflict management techniques on male and female teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in River State.

Table 3: t-test result on conflict management techniques on male and female teachers' job performance

ITEM	Gender	N	Mean	Std.	t-cal	t-critical	Decision
1	Male	191	3.77	0.52	3.47	1.96	Reject
	Female	187	3.54	0.76			
2	Male	191	3.79	0.52	3.25	1.96	Reject
	Female	187	3.58	0.70			
3	Male	191	2.93	0.39	1.19	1.96	Reject
	Female	187	2.88	0.49			
4	Male	191	3.81	0.40	2.63	1.96	Reject
	Female	187	3.67	0.56			
5	Male	191	3.75	0.54	2.11	1.96	Reject
	Female	187	3.62	0.63			
Grand Mean					2.53	1.96	Reject

Table 3 revealed that the grand mean of the calculated-t of 2.53 was greater than the critical-t value 1.96. Based on the decision rule, null hypothesis 1 was rejected and the alternate upheld. Meaning there is significant mean score difference on the influence of school conflict management techniques on male and female teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant mean score difference on the influence of school conflict management techniques on teachers' job performance in urban and rural public secondary schools in River State.

Table 4: t-test result on conflict management techniques based on school location.

ITEM	Location	N	Mean	Std.	t-cal	t-critical	Decision
6	Urban	208	3.02	0.46	0.64	1.96	Accept
	Rural	170	3.05	0.44			
7	Urban	208	3.09	0.54	1.30	1.96	Accept
	Rural	170	3.16	0.54			
8	Urban	208	2.94	0.54	0.10	1.96	Accept
	Rural	170	2.95	0.54			
9	Urban	208	3.64	0.58	0.73	1.96	Accept
	Rural	170	3.69	0.59			
10	Urban	208	3.66	0.61	0.01	1.96	Accept
	Rural	170	3.66	0.67			

Grand Mean	0.55	1.96	Accept
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In Table 4, the grand mean of the calculated-t value of 0.55 was found less than the critical-t value of 1.96. Thus null hypothesis 2 was retained and stated that there is no significant mean score difference on the influence of school conflict management techniques on teachers' job performance in urban and rural public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Discussion

In Table 1, the grand mean (3.53) was found to be greater than the criteria mean (2.50) and it was strongly agreed by the respondents that school conflict management techniques has influence on male and female teachers' job performance. With accommodating having the highest influence on male and female public secondary teachers, followed by compromising, competing, collaborating and avoiding technique respectively.

By implication, conflict management techniques have varying influence on the teachers. Thus, teachers can perform their task better when school conflict is tackled with the appropriate technique. The finding was contrary with Rafiq (2016) who is of the opinion that teachers perform well even if they are not satisfied with the conflict management strategies of the Principal. The finding is supported by Farooq, Faridee, Batool and Yahya (2016) who revealed that there is relationship between conflict management styles with teachers' professional commitment.

Similarly, Table 3 revealed that the grand mean of the calculated-t (2.53) was greater than the critical-t value 1.96. Based on the decision rule, null hypothesis 1 was rejected and the alternate uphold. Meaning there is significant mean score difference on the influence of school conflict management techniques on male and female teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Rivers state. The finding revealed that conflict management techniques influence male and female teachers differently. By extension, there is preference in the use of conflict management techniques. The finding aligned with Habacı (2015) that female teachers generally prefer to adopt a manner in favor of communication and compromise, whereas male teachers adopt an enforcing (oppressive) manner in line with their own opinions. Also, it agreed with Vestal and Torres (2016) that female and male averages differed slightly more in the accommodating and compromising behaviors. It also relates with Rehman and Jaleel (2020) that female teachers were better in competing and accommodating while male teachers were preferred in avoiding, collaborating and compromising.

Table 2 show that the grand mean value of 3.28 was greater than the criteria value 2.50 This suggest that collaborating, competing, avoiding, accommodating and compromising has influence on teachers' job performance. However, the testing of hypothesis suggested that that there is no significant mean score difference on the influence of school conflict management techniques on teachers' job performance in urban and rural public secondary schools in Rivers State. This means that the techniques are workable in both urban and rural areas. The findings failed to agree with Saiti (2014) that the techniques are appreciated in urban schools than in other regions.

Conclusion

Conflict is inevitable in school settings, and administrators must recognize its constructive and destructive potential. Managing conflict effectively is crucial for effective teacher performance. Although conflict cannot be completely eradicated, techniques like collaborating, competing, avoiding, accommodating, and compromising can be effective. The study found that accommodating techniques have the highest influence on male and female public secondary teachers, followed by compromising, competing, collaborating, and avoiding techniques. Despite the fact that conflict cannot be completely averted or eradicated, effective conflict management is essential for a productive educational environment.

Recommendation

Based on the finding of the study it was recommended that:

1. Appropriate conflict management techniques accommodative to both male and female teacher should be used in school to resolve conflict.
2. Conflict management technique that is most suitable for a people in a given location should be promoted to settle disputes.

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