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Principals' management of conflicts in public secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria: A critical survey

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This paper examined principals' management of conflicts in public secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria. As a descriptive survey, the study population comprised all the 281 public secondary schools in the State. Out of this population, a sample of 80 schools was drawn while 340 respondents (80 principals and 260 teachers) were selected through the stratified random sampling technique. A questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The data collected were analyzed using percentages. The findings show that conflicts have not been effectively managed by principals of schools because of their inability to effectively utilize the strategies for resolving conflicts. Based on the findings, it was recommended that principals should inculcate the idea of setting up of committees to resolve conflicts. Principals should allow a free flow of information while communication gap should be prevented. Principals should endeavour to make use of dialogue strategy in managing conflicts in schools. They should be sensitive to students' grievances before the grievances get out of hand. This could be done by having discussions with students on pressing issues in the schools and by allowing students to participate in decision-making.

Key words: Principals, management, conflicts, public, secondary, schools.

INTRODUCTION

Since the attainment of independence in 1960, Nigeria has witnessed many changes in its educational system. These changes have brought about disparities in the system in terms of the different structures that were put forward on the introduction of any new educational system. For instance, at independence, the educational system in Western Nigeria was a 6-6-2-3 system comprising 6 years in primary schools, 6 years in secondary schools, 2 years in the sixth-form classes and 3 years in the university. In Eastern Nigeria, it was a 6-5-2-3 educational system made of 6 years in primary schools, 6 years in secondary classes, 2 years in the sixth-form classes and 3 years in the university. In Northern Nigeria, it was a 4-3-6-2-3 system comprising 4 years in junior primary schools, 3 years in senior primary schools, 6 years in secondary schools, 2 years in the sixth-form classes and 3 years in the university (Aghenta, 2001; Adeyemi, 2004).

In a bid to remove these disparities and give education

a sense of direction based on a solid foundation, the Federal Government formulated a new National Policy on Education which brought about a new educational system that would embrace all States of the country. Accordingly, the sixth form classes were abolished and a uniform system of education known as the 6-3-3-4 educational system was adopted. In compliance with this system, children between the ages of 6 and 12 years would spend 6 years in primary schools while children from ages 13 to 15 years would spend 3 years in the junior secondary schools. Children from ages 16 to 18 years would spend another 3 years in the senior secondary schools while those from ages 19 to 22 years would spend 4 years in the universities for the basic degree programmes Thus, students who desired to pursue purely academic subjects would proceed to the SSC classes at the end of the JSC classes. Students who preferred technical education would proceed to technical colleges while students who desired craft or design would

proceed to vocational schools. Although most of the basic courses in the university run for a period of 4 years, professional courses run for 5 or 6 years. Hence, candidates whose desire is to pursue professional cour-ses could seek admission into the polytechnics, colleges of education and other professional institutes after the completion of the senior secondary certificate programme (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004)

As such, secondary education is the education which children receive in a school system after primary education and before the tertiary level. Its broad goals include the preparation of the child for: useful living within the society. In specific term, secondary education is to provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for higher education. It is to provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional levels. It is to inspire its students with a desire for self improvement. It is to foster national unity as well as provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004).

In enhancing national development, organizations have several roles to play. In pursuance of these roles, conflict tends to set in. Conflict has been described as the art of coming into collision, clash or be in opposition or at variance with one another. It is the tension that is experienced when a group of people feels that their needs or desires are likely to be denied (Pondy, 1972). It is the state of disharmony that could be brought about by differences of impulses, desires or tendencies (Rayeski and Bryant, 1994). It is a form of disagreement between two or more parties (Ibukun, 1997). It could mean a strife, controversy, discord of action, antagonism of interest (Abdu-Raheem, 2004). Owens (1995) was of the view that conflict occurs whenever incompatible activities occur. It could result from an argument with a co-worker.

Thus, in the Nigerian school system, conflict occurs from time to time. It is the art of coming into collision, clash or be in opposition with one another. It is the tension that is experienced when a group of people feels that their needs or desires are likely to be denied (Sessa, 1996; Canavan and Monahan, 2001). It is the state of disharmony that could be brought about by differences of impulses, desires or tendencies (Rayeski and Bryant, 1994). It is a form of disagreement between two or more parties (Ibukun, 1997). It could mean strife, controversy, discord of action, antagonism of interest (Abdu-Raheem, 2004). Owens (1995) was of the view that conflict occurs whenever incompatible activities occur. It could result from an argument with a co-worker.

Researchers have distinguished two types of conflict based on either task or affect (Jennsen et al., 1999). The first type of conflict, often called cognitive conflict or task-focused conflict tends to be issue-related disagreements among team members that focus on common objectives (Amason, 1996). The other type of conflict known as the affect conflict or interpersonal conflict tends to be related to disagreements that come from personality clashes or emotional interactions among team members. Belgard et al. (1995) described other types of conflict based on structural configuration. These include: an individual team member experiencing a conflict that results in the person's inability to perform optimally; two team members in conflict with each other; a team member experiences conflict with all of the other team members; several team members in conflict with several other team members; the entire team experiencing conflict with another team and the entire team experiencing conflict with an individual outside of the team.

Other researchers (Neal and Associates Inc., 2003) have described conflict as being intrapersonal if it occurs within a person especially when one is frustrated with his goals or interpersonal if it occurs between two or more individuals. Nevertheless, Canavan and Monahan (2001) argued that unresolved and poorly managed conflict is the major blockage to school development. Hence, a manager should deal with conflict situations both as a mediator to help resolve conflicts between others and as a participant when he or she is in conflict with someone. Researchers have also argued that competitive goals could increase conflict escalation, resulting in low morale and productivity (Wong et al., 1992). Thus, if conflict is not managed properly, it could lead to dysfunction and disaster (Bens, 1997).

In this regard, Hunts (1992) reported that there are 5 phases of conflict. Phase one is the initial tolerance stage when the bone of contention is noted by members of the group. Phase two involves when the members have noted the continued deviation from expected behaviour. Phase three occurs when there is verbal aggression especially when group members are becoming more annoyed and verbal messages become more hostile and more aggressive. Phase four is when there is physical aggression, that is, when the aggressive party attempts to deal with the issue on the opponent through physical combat while phase five is the stage of rejection when there is total silence and attempts are made to eliminate the deviant behaviour. As such, the nature of the conflict depends upon the type of disagreement between two individuals or groups.

Some researchers have regarded organizational conflict as being inevitable and hence, could not be avoided (Oyebade, 2000). This viewpoint supported earlier findings (Harrison et al., 1995; Townsley, 1997; Bourgeois et al., 1997; Desivilya, 1998). It could arise perhaps as a result of many factors such as an inadequate supply of basic amenities in the schools, inadequate facilities, insufficient audiovisual materials and inadequate number of laboratories (Adeyemi, 1998; Bens, 1999). In the light of these, this study has examined conflict management in Ondo State secondary schools in a bid to determine how

principals of schools have been able to resolve is-sues relating to conflict.

Statement of the problem

In Ondo State Nigeria, there seems to be a frequent occurrence of conflicts in secondary schools. This is perhaps due to the nature of the school system where students and the school authorities seem to disagree on fundamental and socio-related issues. Observations in the school system show that issues on which conflicts occur include frequent hike in school fees, religious matters; mode of dressing; poor classroom space and poor services. The management implication of these conflicts to the effective running of the school system was the problem of this study. In addressing this problem, the following research questions were raised.

Research questions

1. How many times did conflicts occur in public second-dary schools in Ondo State Nigeria in the 2007/2008 academic year?
2. What are the causes of conflicts in public secondary schools in the State?
3. What are the effects of conflicts on secondary schools' activities in the State?
4. Were the management strategies used by principals in resolving conflicts in the schools effective?
5. What other management strategies could be used by principals in resolving conflicts in secondary schools in the State?

METHOD

This study was designed along the lines of a descriptive survey. A descriptive survey is a study that involves a planned collection of data over a large area for the purpose of making description (Oppenheim, 1992). In this regard, the study was intended to examine existing situations about conflicts in secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria. The study population comprised all the 281 public secondary schools in the State. Out of this population, a sample of 80 schools was taken and selected through the stratified random sampling technique (Gay, 1996) taking into consideration variables such as school-sex on the basis of single-sex and mixed schools and school-location on the basis of urban and rural schools. Twelve (12) of the schools were single-sex schools while 68 were mixed-sex schools. 34 were urban schools while 46 were rural schools. Out of the 2560 teachers in the schools, 340 respondents made up of 80 principals and 260 teachers were selected for the study. The process of selection was also through the stratified random sampling technique. The principals and teachers were the respondents in the study.

The instrument used to collect data for the study was a questionnaire titled 'secondary schools conflict management question-naire.' The questionnaire was created or self constructed by the researcher and it was of three parts. Part 1 was demographic. It sought information on the name of the school, the school-sex whether single–sex school or mixed school and the school location whether urban or rural. Part 2 consisted of only one section that requested for data on the number of times conflicts occurred in the schools in the 2007/2008 academic year and it was to be completed by principals of schools. Part 3 consisted of four sections A to D. Sections A to C were to be completed by both the principals and the teachers. Section A sought for information on the causes of conflicts in the schools while section B requested information on the effects of conflicts on schools' activities. Section C elicited in-formation on the effectiveness of the management strategies used by the principals in resolving conflicts in the schools. Section D required information on any other management strategies that could be used by principals to resolve conflicts in the schools and it was to be completed by teachers only.

The content validity of the instrument was determined by experts in Test and Measurement who matched all the items of the que-stionnaire with the research questions to ascertain whether the instrument actually measured what it was supposed to measure. The reliability of the instrument was determined through the test-retest reliability technique (Gay, 1996). In doing this, the instru-ments were administered in the first instance to 30 respondents drawn from 10 schools outside the sample area. After a period of two weeks, the instruments were re-administered to the same respondents. The data collected on the two tests were collated and analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis. A correlation coefficient 'r' of 0.85 was obtained indicating that the instrument was reliable and consistent for the study. The data collected were analyzed through the use of percentages.

RESULTS

Question 1: How many times did conflicts occur in public secondary schools in Ondo State Nigeria in the 2007/2008 academic year?

In answering this question, data on the number of times conflicts occurred in the schools during the 2007/2008 academic year were collected through the questionnaire. Although conflict issues might vary from one country to another, this study is delimited to the conflict issues indicated in Table 1. The scoring pattern was such that conflicts that occurred 30 times and above in each school were considered high level occurrence. Conflicts that occurred 11 to 29 times were considered as moderate level occurrence while conflicts that occurred 10 times and below were considered as low level occurrence. The number of schools where conflicts occurred 30 times and above; between 11 to 29 times and 10 times and below were collated respectively. The data collected were analyzed using percentages. Table 1 shows the fin-dings.

As indicated in Table 1, the findings show that certain conflicts occur more frequently than others. Conflicts on disagreement over issues relating to religion had the highest number of occurrence as they occurred in 62 schools (77.5%). Conflicts over the imposition of decision by authority without due consultation with staff and students were also high (71.3%).

Table 1. Number of times conflicts occurred in the schools in 2007/2008.

Questionnaire items	N	30 times and above	%	11 - 29 times	%	10 and below	%
Conflicts on disagreement over issues relating to religion.	80	62	77.5	12	15.0	06	7.5
Conflicts over the imposition of decision by authority without due consultation with staff and students.	80	57	71.3	15	18.7	08	10.0
Conflicts on personality clash.	80	54	67.5	16	20.0	10	12.5
Conflict resulting from the hike in school fees.	80	53	66.3	18	22.5	09	11.2
Conflict over inadequate classroom space.	80	52	65.0	19	23.7	09	11.3
Conflicts over sudden change in school's policies.	80	50	62.5	18	22.5	12	15.0
Conflicts arising from the disagreement over the strict application of rules and regulations.	80	47	58.7	21	26.3	12	15.0
Conflicts over the allegation of corrupt practices involving members of staff.	80	45	56.3	20	25.0	15	18,7
Conflict over poor 5evices in the library.	80	42	52.5	28	35.5	10	12.5
Conflicts arising from teachers using corporal punishment on students in the schools.	80	41	51.2	20	25.0	19	23.8
Conflicts arising from not paying teachers salaries regularly.	80	34	42.5	26	32.5	20	25.0
Conflicts arising from students' indiscipline.	80	32	40.0	25	31.3	23	28.7
Conflicts arising over poor laundry services.	80	31	38.8	35	43.7	14	17.5
Conflict over poor transport system to he school.	80	25	31.2	21	26.3	34	42.5
Conflict over the inadequate number of specialist teachers.	80	19	23.7	25	31.3	36	45.0
Conflicts arising from inadequate school plant maintenance.	80	18	22.5	27	33.7	35	43.8
Conflict arising from school plant maintenance.	80	16	20.0	23	28.7	41	51.3
Conflict of mode of dressing.	80	15	18.7	34	42.5	31	38.8

Question 2: What are the causes of conflicts in public secondary schools in the State?

In answering this question, data on the causes of con-flicts in the sampled schools were collected from the respondents through the questionnaire. The data collec-ted were analyzed with the use of percentages. The fin-dings are indicated in Tables 2.1 and 2.2.

As shown in Tables 2.1 and 2.2, the cause of conflicts having the highest number of respondents was the strict application of rules and regulations while the cause of conflicts having the least number of respondents were the denial of rights and privileges. The findings showed similarity between the responses of the principals and the teachers on some of the causes of conflicts in the schools. The similarities was in the fact that both the principals and teachers agreed that all the causes of conflicts listed in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 are causes of conflicts in secondary schools in the State. The findings however showed disparity between the responses of the

Table 2.1. Teachers' responses on the causes of conflicts in the Schools.

Items	N	Agree	%	Disagree	%
Strict application of rules and regulations.	80	68	85.0	12	15.0
Frequent change of in policy such as a hike in school fees.	80	65	81.3	15	18.7
High handedness.	80	63	78.8	17	21.2
Disagreement with school's authority.	80	54	67.5	26	32.5
Inadequate facilities for students and staff.	80	52	65.0	28	35.0
Inadequate basic amenities.	80	45	56.3	35	43.7
Non involvement of students in executing policies.	80	43	53.8	37	46.2
General Indiscipline.	80	29	36.3	51	63.7
Allegation of corrupt practices in the school.	80	27	33.8	53	66.2
Communication gap.	80	25	31.2	55	68.8
Denial of rights and privileges.	80	22	27.5	58	72.5

Table 2.2. Teachers' responses on the causes of conflicts in the Schools.

Items	N	Agree	%	Disagree	%
Strict application of rules and regulations.	260	235	90.4	25	9.6
Frequent change of in policy such as a hike in school fees.	260	226	86.9	34	13.1
High handedness.	260	211	81.2	49	18.8
Disagreement with school's authority.	260	195	75.0	65	25.0
Inadequate facilities for students and staff.	260	190	73.1	70	26.9
Inadequate basic amenities.	260	185	71.2	75	28.8
Non involvement of students in executing policies.	260	174	66.9	86	33.1
General Indiscipline.	260	171	65.8	89	34.2
Communication gap.	260	169	65.0	91	35.0
Allegation of corrupt practices in the school.	260	165	63.5	95	36.5
Denial of rights and privileges.	260	162	62.3	98	37.7

principals and those of the teachers. The disparity could be observed in the low percentage in the number of principals as against the high percentages in the number of teachers who claimed that the following namely gene-ral indiscipline; allegation of corrupt practices in the school; communication gap and denial of rights and privi-leges were causes of conflicts in the schools. For in-stance, only 36.3% of the principals claimed that general indiscipline was a cause of conflict in schools whereas as high as 65.8% of the teachers gave the same response. While only 33.8% of the principals claimed that the allegation of corrupt practices was a cause of conflicts in schools, 63.5% of the teachers made the same claim. While only 31.2% of the principals reported that commu-nication gap was a cause of conflicts in schools, 65.0% of the teachers made the same response. While only 27.5% of the principals claimed that the denial of rights and privileges was a cause of conflicts in schools, 62.3% of the teachers made the same claim. This suggests that the teachers might have been more objective than the principals in their responses on the causes of conflicts in the schools.

Question 3: What are the effects of conflicts on secondary schools' activities in the State?

In answering this question, data on the responses given to the questionnaire on the effects of conflicts on school's activities were collected and analyzed using percentages. The findings are shown in Tables 3.1 and 3.2.

In Tables 3.1 and 3.2, the response rate among the principals was almost similar to those of the teachers. The effect of conflicts having the highest response was the possible loss of lives and properties and it was given by 71 of the principals (88.7%) and 228 of the teachers (87.7%). This was followed by the closing down of sch-ools which was the response given by 69 principals (86.3%) and 220 teachers (84.6%). The least response rate was the making of students to pay for damages. This response was given by 61 principals (76.3%) and 203 teachers (78.1%).

Table 3.1. Principals' responses on the effects of conflicts on schools' activities.

	N	Agree	%	Disagree	%
Possible loss of lives and properties.	80	71	88.7.	09	11.3
Closing down of schools.	80	69	86.3	11	13.7
Arrest of staff and students who perpetrated the conflict.	80	67	83.7	13	16.3
Disciplinary action against the teachers found guilty.	80	64	80.0	16	20.0
Suspension or dismissal of of students found guilty.	80	63	78.7	17	21.3
Making all students to pay for damages.	80	61	76.3	19	23.7

Table 3.2. Teachers' responses on the effects of conflicts on schools' activities.

	N	Agree	%	Disagree	%
Possible loss of lives and properties.	260	228	87.7	32	12.3
Closing down of schools.	260	220	84.6	40	15.4
Arrest of staff and students who perpetrated the conflict.	260	218	83.8	42	16.2
Disciplinary action against the teachers found guilty.	260	215	82.7	45	17.3
Suspension or dismissal of students found guilty.	260	206	79.2	54	20.8
Making all students to pay for damages.	260	203	78.1	57	21.9

Table 4.1. Principals' responses on the effectiveness of the management strategies.

Management strategies	N	Effective in resolving conflicts	%	Ineffective in resolving conflicts	%
Provision of basic amenities such as electricity, potable water and other facilities for students.	80	10	12.5	70	87.5
Involving students in upholding discipline in schools.	80	12	15.9	68	85.0
Allowing the free flow of communication.	80	21	26.3	59	73.7
Allowing other parties to mediate in students' conflict.		17	21.3	63	78.7
Inviting security agents to suppress conflicts in schools.	80	61	76.2	19	23.8
Denying students access to relevant information.		22	27.5	58	72.5
Total average	80	24	30.0	56	70.0

Question 4: Were the management strategies used by principals in resolving conflicts in the schools effective?

In answering this question, data on the effectiveness of the strategies used by principals in resolving conflicts in the schools were collected from the responses to the questionnaire and analyzed using percentages. The findings are presented in Tables 4.1 and 4.2.

In Tables 4.1 and 4.2, the respondents claimed that most of the strategies were not effective in resolving conflicts in their schools. This was evident in the large number of respondents who claimed that the strategies used by principals of schools were not effective. The strategy having the highest response of ineffectiveness was the provision of basic amenities such as electricity, potable water and other facilities for students. 70 prin-

cipals (87.5%) and 215 teachers (82.7%) gave this response. This was followed by the strategy of involving students in upholding discipline in schools. This response was given by 68 principals (85%) and 208 teachers (80%).

The findings however showed some similarities and differences in the pattern of responses. While the principals and teachers agreed in their responses on certain strategies, they disagreed in the use of some other strategies. There was similarity in their responses on the ineffective use of strategies such as the provision of basic amenities; involving students in upholding discipline in schools; allowing the free flow of communication; allowing other parties to mediate in students' conflict and denying students access to relevant information. There were however differences in the responses of the principals and teachers on the use of other strategies. They

Table 4.2. Teachers' responses on the effectiveness of the management strategies.

Management strategies	N	Effective in resolving conflicts	%	Ineffective in resolving conflicts	%
Provision of basic amenities such as electricity, potable water and other facilities for students.	260	45	17.3	215	82.7
Involving students in upholding discipline in schools.	260	52	20.0	208	80.0
Allowing the free flow of communication.	260	67	25.8	193	74.2
Allowing other parties to mediate in students' conflict.	260	86	33.1	174	66.9
Inviting security agents to suppress conflicts in schools.	260	87	33.5	173	66.5
Denying students access to relevant information.	260	89	34.2	171	65.8
Total average	260	71	27.3	189	72.7

Table 5. Management strategies that could be used to resolve conflicts in secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria.

Management strategies	N	Agree	%	Disagree	%
Setting up of committees to resolve conflicts.	260	197	75.8	63	24.2
Involving students in decision making.	260	189	72.7	71	27.3
Allowing free flow of information from management to students.	260	186	71.5	74	28.5
Sensitive to students' grievances.	260	181	69.6	79	30.4
Using the dialogue strategy.	260	176	67.7	84	32.3
Total average	260	186	71.5	74	28.5

disagreed on the strategy of inviting security agents to suppress conflicts in schools. While only 19 principals (23.8%) claimed that the strategy was ineffective as many as 173 teachers (66.5%) reported that the strategy was ineffective. Another difference was found in the overall level of effectiveness. The overall average level of effectiveness of the strategies as given by the principals was 30.0% whereas the overall average level of effectiveness of the strategies as given by the teachers was only 27.3%. This implies that the teachers might perhaps have been more objective than the principals in the assessment of the effectiveness of management strategies used in resolving conflicts in the schools.

Question 5: What other management strategies could be used by principals in resolving conflicts in secondary schools in the State?

In answering this question, data on other management strategies could be used by principals in resolving conflicts in secondary schools in the State were collected from the responses of teachers to the questionnaire. The data were analyzed using percentages. The findings are indicated in Table 5.

In Table 5, the respondents claimed that other strategies that could be used by principals in resolving conflicts include setting up of committees to resolve conflicts, involving students in decision making, allowing

free flow of information from management to students and being sensitive to students' grievances, using the dialogue strategy. Of all these strategies, the strategy having the highest response rare was the setting up of committees to resolve conflicts which had 197 respondents (75.8%). This was followed by the strategy of evolving students in decision making which had 189 respondents (72.7%) and the strategy of allowing free flow of information from management to students which had 186 respondents (71.5%)

DISCUSSION

This study examined the management of conflicts by principals of secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria. The findings show that certain conflicts occur more frequently than others. An example was the frequent change of in policy such as a hike in school fees which could result in conflicts among students. These findings were in consonance with the findings of previous researchers (Oyedeji, 1998; Adebayo, 2001). Other examples are conflicts on disagreement over issues relating to religion which had the highest number of occurrence as they occurred in 62 schools (77.5%). Conflicts over the imposition of decision by authority without due consultation with staff and students were also high as they occurred in 57 schools (71.3%). This finding was consistent with the findings in previous studies (Amason,

1996; Oyebade, 2000). Conflicts over the imposition of decision by authority without due consultation with staff and students were also high as they occurred 30 times and above in 57 schools (71.3%).

The findings on the causes of conflicts in the schools showed disparities between the responses of the principals and those of the teachers. The cause of conflicts having the highest number of responses was the strict application of rules and regulations while the cause of conflicts having the least responses was the denial of rights and privileges. These findings were consistent with the findings in previous studies (Owens, 1995). The findings also agreed with the findings of previous researchers (Bens, 1997; Adepoju, 1998). The finding indicating communication gap between principals and students as a cause of conflict in schools was in consonance with Adebayo's (2001) findings which indicated that conflicts occur as a result of a communication gap between management and students. The findings indicating the cause of conflicts as the disagreement between students and school's authority was consistent with those of Rayeaki and Bryant (1994), Cappozzoli (1995) and Akinyemi (2002) who found in their studies that conflicts resulted from disagreement between students and school authority. An overview of the findings shows that teachers were more objective in their re-sponses to the causes of conflicts than the principals. This suggests that more teachers perhaps were of the view that the listed causes were the major causes of conflicts in Nigerian schools.

The findings on the effects of conflicts on schools' activities showed a similar trend in the pattern of responses among the principals and the teachers. The effect of conflicts having the highest response was the possible loss of lives and properties and it was given by 71 principals (88.7%) and 228 teachers (87.7%). This finding was consistent with the findings of previous studies (Sessa, 1996; Adepoju, 1998). The effect of con-flicts having the least response was the making of stu-dents to pay for damages which it was given by 61 principals (76.3%) and 203 teachers (78.1%). The finding agreed with earlier findings (Desivilya, 1998).

The views of the respondents on the strategies used by principals in resolving conflicts in the schools were in different dimensions. While the principals and teachers agreed in their response on certain strategies, they disagreed on some other strategies. They agreed that strategies such as the provision of basic amenities; involving students in upholding discipline; setting up of committees to resolve conflicts; allowing the free flow of communication; involving students in decision-making; allowing free flow of information; being sensitive to students' grievances and the use of dialogue were not effectively used by principals. These findings were consistent with the findings in previous studies (Townsley, 1997).

The responses of the principals and teachers however differed in the use of other strategies such as allowing other parties to mediate in students' conflict; inviting security agents to suppress conflicts and denying students access to relevant information. While the principals claimed that they made an effective use of these strategies, a higher percentage of the teachers reported that the strategies were not effectively used by the principals. Another difference was found in the overall level of effectiveness of the management strategies which the principals claimed to be 30.0% and which the teachers claimed otherwise to be 27.3%. This implies that the teachers might perhaps have been more objective than principals in the assessment of the effectiveness of the strategies used in resolving conflicts in schools. The low level of effectiveness of the strategies found in many schools negated the findings of previous researchers (Hunts, 1992; Bens, 1999) but agreed with the findings of others (Canavan & Monahan, 2001; Abdu-Raheem 2004). An overview of the findings shows that the management of conflicts in the schools was a function of the principals' level of effectiveness.

There were however certain limitations to the study. These include limitations in methodology. Since the focus of the study was on principals' management of conflicts in secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria, the analysis of data on the responses made by the respondents to issues raised in the study were restricted to the use of percentages. Inferential statistics such as the chi-square test, t-test, one-way analysis of variance and correlation were not used in the analysis of data for this study since the study did not involve the raising of hypotheses.

Conclusion

The findings of this study have led the researcher to conclude that generally conflicts have not been effectively managed by principals of secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria. This is evident in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 which revealed that many of the strategies did not resolve the conflicts in schools. This shows that many principals might have been grossly ineffective in the use of management strategies in resolving conflicts in schools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it was recommended that principals should ensure the provision of basic amenities such as electricity, potable water and other facilities by government in all schools in the State. They should also inculcate the idea of setting up of committees to resolve conflicts. Such committees should be representative of all teachers and students. Principals should allow a free flow of information from management to students while communication gap should be prevented. Principals should endeavour to make use of dialogue strategy in managing

conflicts in schools. They should be sensitive to students' grievances before the grievances get out of hand. This could be done by having discussions with students on pressing issues in the schools and by allowing students to participate in decision-making. Principals should be able to recognize that there is conflict when there is a disagreement between management and students. They should be able to identify the cause of the conflict; noting the implications of allowing the conflict to prolong; agreeing with the opposing views; attacking the issue and not the members involved and developing an action plan on how the conflict could be resolved.

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