

## Conflict Management Strategies of Principals in Resolving Students' Conflict in Secondary School in Port Harcourt Metropolis

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**Abstract:** The study investigated the conflict management strategies of principals in resolving students' conflict in secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis. The descriptive survey design was employed in the study. Two research question and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. A population of five hundred and sixteen (516) principals in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis were used for the study. The sampling techniques that were used were the fluid survey sample size method, simple random and stratified random sample techniques. The sample size of three hundred and twenty principals were drawn from the population of the study. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled: Principal Conflict Management Strategies (PCMS). The statistical mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while the Independent t-test at 0.05 level of significance was used to test the hypotheses. The result showed that conflict management strategies of principals in resolving students' conflict in secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis thus: The gender respondents did not matter as most of the handling strategies of students' conflict hinged on contingencies and nature of conflict. Educational qualification of the principals in handling students' conflicts did not play a major role since most of the respondents did not matter as most of the handling students' conflict. The researcher recommended that principals should adopt the most optimal approach in handling students' conflicts in order to forestall occurrences. Also, principals should from time to time he given a forum to share their experiences of how they handle conflicts of their teenagers or how such experiences bear in their handling of conflicts in their various schools.

**Keywords:** Conflict, Students, Conflict Resolution Strategies, Principals.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Peaceful coexistence, team spirit and joint focus are basic requirements for the achievement of organizational objectives and continuous maintenance of conducive working atmosphere of the various groups of staff and management team are common characteristics of formal organizations. Schools are not exempted from the need to maintain peaceful working environment. However, just like other social and formal organizations are facing challenges of various conflicts. This is because schools comprise numerous levels of students, teachers, administrative and ad hoc staff, entrepreneurs and various service providers who have emerged from various backgrounds to work together, and each contributing to the holistic attainment of institutional goals (Agi, 2015).

It is the complex nature of these human beings that induces conflicts in the various institutions. Josephine, Okai and Bright (2014) noted that the complex nature of a school is such that it hosts people of diverse attitudes, temperaments, emotions, values, religions, ethnicities, sexes, socioeconomic backgrounds, family upbringings and so on. This without doubt would breed conflicts. Some of the attitudes of the students that may lead to conflicts among the students body on one hand and with the management on the other are behaviors like as examination malpractices, truancy, cultism, arrogance, violent protests and various delinquencies.

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Principals, host community, government agencies, and international community, students and staff are not just born and grown in the schools, they are products of various homes, which are based in the communities that constitute the society, but are later relocated into the school community for further growth and development. Invariably, the cultures and characters they were borne and grown with usually follow them into the school system which has its own inherent problems. Besides the challenges of organizing activities that are needful in performing her emerging roles as a model of change and innovation, Pibowei-Okubo (2019) observed that issues like inadequate funding, examination malpractices and violent extremisms within the last two to three decades alone make it very difficult for the school to achieve her goals of quality education and meet with the global standard of contributing immensely to societal development. Low productivity is the cumulative effect of constant conflicts among the people in school community. In spite of these conflicts however, the Nigerian society still largely depends on the products of the school to proffer solutions to societal problems as well as make the most laudable contributions to its progress. Hence, conflict is inevitable; and although it has an undertone of malice, it can be greatly beneficial if properly controlled. It may be avoided in some cases or minimized, but cannot be fully eradicated.

Education is the key that unlocks potentials, the tool for development and the heart of a society. In Nigeria, secondary school education is next school level that one secures after the completion of primary school. It is the education that ultimately leads students into special area of development, gives them maturity and prepare them for the world of work, and secondary schools. Secondary educator, is the ultimate and most important level for the all-inclusive achievement of educational goals in every society. The programs of secondary schools are comprehensive, and participants are awarded certificates.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Conflict has become a human attribute and inevitable. The methods of handling conflicts have become a major concern in our school system including secondary schools. The need for principals to adopt the right approach in quelling conflicts in the students dominated community is various crucial. It appears various strategies adopted by principals have not worked as conflicts in our secondary school system have continued. The issue of cultism, students' riots, use of explosive scare have been in the open.

How principals will manage these conflicts are crucial to their attaining the goals of the secondary school education. A situation where every young students will involve in arms and violent activities in the school system is alarming. Students no longer concentrate or pay attention to their academics but have taking to other activities giving rise to increased conflicts and how the principals are able to manage these forms of conflicts in the contemporary will be the quest of this study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine the conflict management strategies of principals in resolving students' conflict in secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis.

### **The other specific objectives are:**

1. To ascertain the conflict management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on gender.
2. To ascertain the conflict management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on educational qualification.

### **Research Questions**

#### **The following research questions guided the study:**

1. What are the conflict management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on gender?
2. What are the conflict management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on educational qualification?

### **Research Hypotheses**

#### **The following hypotheses guided the study:**

1. There is no significant difference in the conflict management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the conflict management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on educational qualification.

## 2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Conflict

Definitions of conflict had focused on a wide variety of different phenomena. Synder (1957), defined conflict as arising from antecedent conditions, emotions, perceptions and behaviours which leads to crisis. Pondy (2007) sees conflict as the process which begins when one party perceives that another has frustrated or is about to frustrate some agreement earlier agreed on. Conflict according to, Pool (Pool, 2007) defined conflict to include events (usually a party's perception) which occur prior to the choice of conflict-handling modes. Nweke, (2018) defined conflict as a state of unrest, a crisis developed situation. Conflict in sum can be seen as a situation of unease, which could manifest in the form of grievance, fight, quarrel, complaints and other forms of emotional outburst.

Conflicts have done damages to educational values and long-lasting solutions are regularly needful so as not to allow the goals of secondary school education to be threatened. There are no fruits without roots. Many of the conflicts that affect effectiveness in higher education are caused by the various segments of the society at large: the family, community, peer influence, socio-political activities, school management, host community, government agencies, and international community (Pibowei-Okubo, 2019).

Students and staff are not just born and grown in the secondary schools, they are products of various homes, which are based in the communities that constitute the society, but are later relocated into the secondary schools for further growth and development. Invariably, the cultures and characters they were borne and grown with usually follow them into the school system which has its own inherent problems (Pibowei-Okubo, 2019). Besides the challenges of organizing activities that are needful in performing her emerging roles as a model of change and innovation, Pibowei-Okubo (2019) observed that issues like inadequate funding, examination malpractices and violent extremisms within the last two to three decades alone make it very difficult for the secondary school system to achieve her goals of quality education and meet with the global standard of contributing immensely to societal development.

Low productivity is the cumulative effect of constant conflicts among the people in secondary school community. In spite of these conflicts, Nigerian society still at large depends on the products of secondary school to proffer solutions to societal problems as well as make the most laudable contributions to its progress. Hence, conflict is inevitable; and although it has an undertone of malice, it can be greatly beneficial if properly controlled. It may be avoided in some cases or minimized, but cannot be fully eradicated (Pibowei-Okubo, 2019).

### Types of Conflicts in Secondary Schools

Conflict is not the same as discomfort. The conflict isn't the problem - it is when conflict is poorly managed it becomes a problem. The better educators and students understand the nature of conflict, and they are able to manage conflicts constructively. Moran (2001) saw 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 as a concept never remain positive or negative but it has always been seen as a basic and result oriented part of school life. Conflicts offer competitive as well as cooperative context in the organization but it varies according to the situation. Problems exist in managing conflicts when the context is competitive/individualistic or when the context and the conflict resolution procedures are incongruent. The effectiveness of a conflict resolution and peer mediation program may be limited when the classroom and school context is competitive.

Various schools of thought have advanced their opinions about the types and forms of conflict.

Urias (2018) has classified conflicts in two broad clusters which are equally applicable to the secondary school. They are personal conflict and group conflict. Personal conflict can be intrapersonal or inter-personal which are explained as follows:

- **Affective Conflict:** This is defined as a condition in which group members have interpersonal clashes characterized by anger, frustration, and other negative feelings" Jehn (2010) characterized this type of conflict as disagreements among group members' ideas and opinions about the task being performed, such as disagreement regarding an organization's current strategic position or determining the correct data to include in a report.
- **Conflict of Interest:** This is defined as an inconsistency between two parties in their preferences for the allocation of a scarce resource. This type of conflict occurs when each party, sharing the same understanding of the situation, prefers a different and somewhat incompatible solution to a problem involving either a distribution of scarce resources between them or a decision to share the work of solving it Conflict of Values (Rahim, 2002). This occurs when two social entities differ in their values or ideologies on certain issues. This is also called ideological conflict.
- **Goal Conflict:** This occurs when a preferred outcome or an end-state of two social entities is inconsistent. Realistic versus Nonrealistic Conflict Realistic conflict is associated with mostly rational or goal-oriented disagreement, nonrealistic conflict "is an end in itself having little to do with group or organizational goals. Institutionalized versus Non-institutionalized Conflict. The former is characterized by situations in which actors follow explicit rules, and

display predictable behavior, and their relationship has continuity, as in the case of line-staff conflict or labor-management negotiations. Most racial conflict is non-institutionalized where these three conditions are nonexistent. Retributive Conflict: This conflict is characterized by a situation where the conflicting entities or factions feel the need for a drawn-out conflict to punish the opponent. In other words, each party determines its gains, in part, by incurring costs to the other party (Nieva, 2000).

- **Misattributed Conflict:** This relates to the incorrect assignment of causes (behaviors, parties, or issues) to conflict. For example, an employee may wrongly attribute to his or her supervisor a cut in the employee's financial budget, which may have been done by higher-level managers over the protest of the supervisor.
- **Displaced Conflict:** This type of conflict occurs when the conflicting parties either direct their frustrations or hostilities to social entities that are not involved in conflict or argue over secondary, not major, issues.
- **Intra-Personal Conflict:** This type of conflict is common among young secondary school students seeking for identity and recognition or even secondary school staff, who has just experienced the loss of a loved one, or anyone who carries a sense of inadequacy in one area of life or another. This occurs within an individual as a psychological experience bringing about emotional disorder. It could result from the individual's thoughts, deep negative feelings, inferiority complex, set of values, principles and emotions. Kinanee (2018) warned that if such an individual is not given quick attention, the condition may be chaotic. Hence, it is very needful to urgently organize counseling therapy that could prevent the individual from falling into frustration, depression and untimely death.
- **Interpersonal Conflict:** This refers to a conflict between two individuals. This occurs typically due to how people are different from one another. Individuals vary and are incompatible in their choices and opinions. In the secondary school, it can be a contention between a principal and a teacher or between staff of equal ranking. The conflict may emanate from their tasks or from their established relationship. Low productivity is the result of working together in an unfriendly or hostile atmosphere.
- **Intra-Group Conflict:** This takes place when a misunderstanding arises among different team members or different teams within a staff room or class room in the secondary school. This could be among students or staff in the same school, option or club. The group may be formal or informal.
- **Intergroup Conflict:** This type of conflict happens when the individuals within a team dispute with people in another group within the secondary school. This could result from games, sports or some sort of competitions among various groups of students and staff in the secondary school. There could be ethnic or religious inter-group conflicts within the secondary school in certain part of the country. Rivalry clashes of cultists in one group against another are an example of inter-group conflict. All the other forms of conflicts can easily transform into an inter-group conflict. For instance, one group expressing special likeness for or interest in a particular superior against another superior could lead to tribal disputes among faculty members one hand, administrative staff on the other.

### Causes of Conflict

Conflicts are said to be natural and inevitable. But they do not just happen; they are caused. Most conflicts go through processes of development and numerous factors are responsible for their eruptions, some of which are:

- **Lack of Autonomy and Academic Freedom:** Sanda (1992), disclosed that academic freedom means freedom to organize the secondary school, design and teach courses, associate with others, do research, prepare materials for teaching, exchange and hold ideas without any fear of harassment, contradiction or victimization and challenge all in pursuit of truth.
- **Inadequate Facilities:** Norbe, (2000) asserted that inadequate funding is usually the main cause of the squabble between teachers and the government. Lack of sufficient fund makes very critical for secondary school administrators to effectively drive the system to goal attainment. Insufficient facilities cause disagreements among students and staff.
- **Nepotism and Favoritism:** Conflicts arise when promotions, appointments and awards are not meritoriously given to deserving individuals. In agreement to this, Obinna (2019) asserted that when appointments and promotions in the secondary school are not done in good faith, with equity and fairness, it is dangerous and can result in a war.
- **Increase in School Fees:** Frequent increases in school fees without proper communication to students can lead to conflicts. Denied participation of students in decision-making on issues that directly affect them can be hazardous. Impositions of levies on Students have always been greeted by vehement disagreement.
- **Gross Mismanagement of Available Lean Resources or Embezzlements:** The principals, teachers, administrator, and other financial stakeholders of a secondary school ought to show financial prowess, prudence and transparency in handling corporate resources. Financial impropriety generates so much grumbling in any academic environment where learned fellows could easily see and analyse how resources are being provided and utilized. Ololube (2016), revealed that fund management is the act of planning, organizing and controlling monetary resources in one's care while mismanagement means to manage incompetently or dishonestly any valuable thing put in one's care. "Funds mismanagement is the management processes and practices that deliberately mishandle moneys made available to a person in ways that are characterized as badly or carelessly" (Ololube, 2016).
- **Ineffective Communication:** An institution is best described by the status of its communication. When hierarchical

orders of administration are not well spelt out, there would be frequent errors. When job specification and description of staff are not well articulated, there would be overlapping of authority or responsibility and confusion. When appropriate orientation for new students and staff is not given, rules and regulations of the school will suffer.

- **Management Style of the Administrator:** The Chief managements of secondary school are Principal, teacher and Head of Administration. The kind of administrative style adopted in running an institution would to a large extent determine the types and magnitude of conflicts in the school. Pibowei-Okubo (2018b) argued that if leadership is autocratic, it is a time bomb! There is bound to be chaos from staff going on strike to students' protests, and community unrest.
- **Managerial Loopholes:** Pibowei-Okubo (2018), revealed that management do not often care about students' living environment and condition. They often do not show understanding to their plights. For instance, there could be power shortage and epileptic water supply for several weeks; and no one cares until it results in riot. There are no functional counselling programs to help students solve emotional and academic problems on campus. And their complaints do not often receive prompt attention due to bureaucratic processes.
- **Unfriendly Atmosphere:** In most secondary schools, friendly atmospheres are not generated between students, staff and management. Most of the staffs are habitually unapproachable. Helping students to solve common administrative problems is perceived as burdensome. Students are often perceived as "never right". Hence when there are cases of breaking of school rules and regulations, they are scarcely given fair hearing. This makes them seek redress or justice, which they do either by violence or by going to court (Pibowei-Okubo, 2018).
- **Constraints on Students Unionism:** Students often detest any inconsequential restrictions on their lines of activities. They do not usually accept to be couched or taken unawares. They react against increased school fees and imposition of levies, lack of basic amenities, uncondusive learning environment, lack of recreational activities and facilities, suspension or expulsion of members of the students union executives; defend fellow students against whatever they consider as unjust by faculty members or management, resist imposition of examination time table and organize protests against the school management and government at any slightest aggravation. (Turner, 2007).
- **Vices among Students:** Immoralities among students make the secondary school environment a breeding ground for conflicts. These include drunkenness, sexual harassment, homosexuality, smoking, promiscuity, indecent dressing, clubbing, stealing, vandalism, vulgar language, drug abuse/addiction, examination malpractices, and harassment of teachers and so on. Students who possess any of these vices have the features of at least three others. Students characterized with these vices are prone to conflicts because they can go into open disputes while drinking and smoking; fight over girlfriends and boyfriends; vandalize school valuable properties, dress irresponsibly and speak jargons after taking some doses of hard drug. All these are sources of conflicts. (Burner, 2012).
- **Cultism:** Among the various violent extremisms in secondary schools, cultism is the most common and the deadliest form of conflict among students and sometimes involving staff. Various cult groups spring up in higher institutions with members in other campuses. They usually possess weapons like knives, machetes, club and guns. Rivalry groups swing into open assaults against another at every slightest provocation, leaving many students and other innocent varsity citizens dead or badly injured. (Nwidum, 2003).
- **Unchecked Conducts of Secondary school Dons:** Observations show that a number of faculty members are involved with students in the same cultism groups, many demand for bribes from students, arid sometimes sexually abuse female students; they support examination malpractices, indulge in drug addiction, insult students' sensibility, impose levies, and fail students at will. Some of them lack befitting personality to contribute to achievement of organizational goals in a social system like the secondary school (Pibowei-Okubo, 2018). When students are pushed to the wall, conflicts are bound to erupt, the result is creation of anarchy.
- **Politics and National Issues:** The issues of who becomes the next Principal or Vice Principal and Head of Administration in an institution usually result to conflict. Disputes are inevitable when administrators push for positions with desperation. Also, the kinds of policies and manners of introducing or communicating them by the management to the secondary school community can lead to outbreak of conflict in an institution. Direct or open involvement of secondary school administrators in national or state politics is chaotic; this could lead to the dissolution of their cabinets by the sitting government or the incoming one. (Ololube, 2018).

### Principals' Conflict Resolution Strategies

David, (1996) hold that Conflict resolution and peer mediation programs are often promoted as a way to reduce violence (and destructively managed conflicts) in schools. Management of conflict is a human relations concept long recognized in business and industry as a necessary component of the developmental process. Sweeney and Caruthers (2006) define conflict resolution in a most general and concise way, the process used by parties in conflict to reach a settlement.

Conflict is a controversy or divergence of opinion between two or more people in an organisation about something that was not done or to be done in a work environment in which opposing views are strongly held Ulo (2011). Conflict could be described as a tension state which attempts to prevent or frustrate another person from achieving a desired goal. In another contribution, Omoike (2014) defined conflict as that which could happen between two or more

people or groups with incompatible goals in an organization while conflict as the process where a party deliberately makes an effort to block the efforts of another party (person) and thereby frustrates the latter in attempt to attain goals or further interest Ogonor (2004).

Conflict management is a process by which organizations deal with a major events or events that threatens the organisation, its stakeholders and the general public, Behfar, Peterson, Mannis and Trochion (2008). Conflict management is a crucial issue in school administration because no meaningful teaching and learning can take place in a conflict ridden environment. In considering the fact that where two or more people are together, there is bound to be disagreement which when left unattended could result to conflict. Some school administrators view conflict as a negative situation which must be avoided at all cost but in reality conflict necessitates management because it creates opportunity for personal growth especially when proper strategy is advanced for solving the conflict. Principals as the administrative heads of secondary schools are faced with conflicts in the bid to influence and co-ordinate school resources for goal attainment, Aja (2015).

School principals are faced with conflicts emanating from their administrative style, policy implementation, supervision of instruction, examination malpractice, illegal levies, staff posting and transfer, Parent Teachers Association (PTA) and other school based committees as well as school related issues. It is therefore necessary that school managers or administrators should be knowledgeable in the conflict management strategies. This gives rise to different strategies and styles or techniques principals, administrators, policy makers of secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis adopt in managing conflicts. Authorities in dispute and conflict management have identified the following styles of conflict management used by leaders in various organizations. They include: accommodation, compromise, collaboration, competition, withdrawal, avoidance. Also, arbitration, mediation, negotiation, reconciliation bargaining, problem solving and peace-making through the use of force as some of the strategies for conflict management in the organisation. Other student's crises management strategies include the use of joint problem solving, use of force, third party conference, persuasion, confrontation, win-lose and avoidance. The researchers defined conflict management as strategies adopted by principals to reduce or resolve existing crisis and to prevent the occurrence of subsequent ones in any organizations, Benson (2011).

In Nigeria and most other parts of the world, students are being controlled and guided in schools by rules and regulations, school time tables, and curriculum contents etc. These however, affect students' behaviour and learning. Teachers who implement the organizational control patterns are also faced with other statutory duties, such as: updating Continuous Assessment Records, Class Registers, Diaries and Scheme of Work. The principals and teachers do have constraints than any other member of the society as they may be required to be diligent, honest, and responsible, irrespective of the conflicts that could arise in the schools while performing these roles. Therefore, when conflict arises, they must be managed with a view to resolving them, using either of these strategies: integrating, compromising, avoiding, and dominating.

Integrating strategy focuses on gathering and organizing information; at the same time, it encourages creative thinking and welcomes diverse perspectives. This strategy enable parties involve in conflict to pool all their information together, put their differences on the table and examine them along with any data that might contribute to a resolution. This leads to the development of alternative solution which addresses all parts of the conflict, other than the initial solutions of the parties. What this implies in the school system is that, both the school authority and students must be able and willing to contribute time, energy, and resources to finding and implementing a solution.

Dominating strategy is used by the school manager to resolve the conflict by dictating what the subordinates will do. That is, school management simply resolves conflict as it sees fit and communicates its desires to the students. The students usually will abide by a superior's decision, whether or not the students agree with it. Specifically, it advocates the establishment of a superordinate-subordinate relationship. The dominating strategy does not allow input from the students in the school system, Iwowari (2007).

Compromizing strategy is a middle of the road strategy that gets every one talking about issues and moves one closer to each other and to a resolution. In compromise, each person has something to give and something to take. In the school system compromise is more effective when issues are complex and parties in conflict looking for middle ground, and willing to exchange concessions. Hence, negotiation and bargaining are complementary skills (Kalagbor, 2003).

Conflict avoidance occurs when one party in a potential conflict ignores the conflicting issues or denies the significant of the conflict to his.life. It is a way of not addressing the conflict, or a tactical way of postponing the conflict for a better time, if at all such time will come. Note that in this situation, the principal or teacher is unassertive, and uncooperative. There is no intention to pursue one's own needs or the needs of the school. It connotes the process of withdrawing from conflict situations in the school that might cause unpleasantness for the principal or teacher.

From the for-goings, it should be stated that the school as a social system has its own norms and values and it is characterized by complex relationships between members of the system: principals, teachers, nonteaching staff and students. Due to the high degree of interdependence of duties and individual differences in role expectations, conflicts do arise from different circumstances and situations among members of the school system and would be addressed by the application of the above mentioned strategies.

In a related perspective, the major orientation of the school therefore, has been on supporting the society to socialize the students to be worthwhile as future leaders. As it is in any other institution, schools are characterized by social conflicts emanating from interactions among group members and formal structure of authority. The school involves dimensional conflicts both in the structural and behavioural patterns of the individuals in the system, Kalagbor (2007).

An educational institution is a heterogeneous assembly of youths and adults from different family, cultural, religious, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. The management of a school like any human organization is more complex than the management of business due to the tendency of the "managed" to accept or resist a managerial process.

In order to achieve the goals and objectives of secondary education in Nigeria, its superintendent and management have been vested on the principal. The principal is recognized as an administrative, instructional, human relations and public relations manager. He is expected to exhibit some leadership traits which will make for the cordial and stable relationships in the school in order to achieve the co-operation of all in working towards the achievement of the goals.

In the Nigerian school system, conflicts occur from time to time. It is the art of coming into collision or be in opposition with another. It is the tension that is experienced when a group of people feels that their needs or desire are likely to be denied'. Conflict as a phenomenon can be expressed in behaviour. Peacefully, it could take the form of boycott of lecturers, peaceful procession with placards, hunger strikes etc. Violent students' protest takes the forms of rampage, obstructing free flow of traffic and destruction of properties.

Management on the other hand, is the guidance or direction of people towards organizational goals and objectives. It can also be seen as the supervising, controlling and co-ordinating of activity to attain optimum results with organizational resources. Thus, management of student conflicts may be said to refer to the handling and control of student conflict. Conflict management strategies can be grouped into three major headings: Avoidance/denial; Confrontation/fighting; and problem solving. Under avoidance/denial, school administrators may decide to avoid the other parties to the issue or generally pretend that the issues do not exist even though feelings may have been hurt. Confrontation/fighting most often than not ends in violence and creates a situation where most if not all parties become losers one way or the other. In confrontation, there is a tendency of one party dominating or behaving in an abusive or arrogant manner especially if it presumes itself stronger. The problem solving approach is conciliatory in nature as it takes into consideration the needs, fears and concerns of those involved while attempting to harmonize them. Here parties listen to themselves with intent to understanding the underlying elements in the conflict while resolving the issues. In this approach, there is a show of respect for differences and the need to find a common ground. However, every conflict situation has its peculiarities and circumstances, the solution to which would largely depend on how it is perceived by all concerned, Igwe (1990).

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

### **The study anchored on the following theory:**

- Mediation Theory or Facilitative Mediation Theory

The mediation theory of Professor Leonard Riskin, in 1994. In the 1960's and 1970's, there was only one type of mediation being taught and practiced, which is now being called "Facilitative Mediation". In facilitative mediation, the mediator structures a process to assist the parties in reaching a mutually agreeable resolution. The mediator asks questions; validates and normalizes parties' points of view; searches for interests underneath the positions taken by parties; and assists the parties in finding and analyzing options for resolution. The facilitative mediator does not make recommendations to the parties, give his or her own advice or opinion as to the outcome of the case, or predict what a court would do in the case. The mediator is in charge of the process, while the parties are in charge of the outcome. Facilitative mediators want to ensure that parties come to agreements based on information and understanding. They predominantly hold joint sessions with all parties present so that the parties can hear each other's points of view, but hold caucuses regularly. They want the parties to have the major influence on decisions made, rather than the parties' attorneys. Facilitative mediation grew up in the era of volunteer dispute resolution centres, in which the volunteer mediators were not required to have substantive expertise concerning the area of the dispute, and in which most often there were no attorneys present. The volunteer mediators came from all backgrounds. These things are still true today, but in addition many professional mediators, with and without substantive expertise, also practice facilitative mediation.

- **Cognitive Mediation Theory**

On the other hand, Cognitive mediation theory was proposed by American psychologist Richard Lazarus (1922-2002). This theory attempts to explain the relationship between cognition, emotion, and stress and focuses on the role of "appraisal". Appraisal is the tendency of the human mind to make automatic and unconscious assessments of not only a situation, but also what that situation means to them. When an individual perceives a stimulus cognitive properties elicit arousal and emotion which are associated with that stimulus. The cognitive appraisal of the stimulus is what causes future emotional responses like stress or fear to be associated with the stimulus.

## **EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

Naido (2017) found that students' performance can probably be attributed to positive or negative consequences that a teacher may encounter based on his/her attendance record, and the fact that the Board and the principal can react immediately to deal with defaulting teachers and do not have to wait for the school management to respond. There is immediate accountability on the part of teachers. The way school managers run their schools and their management styles are also crucial in the manner every school functions.

Nibe (2009), carried out a research in Bori, on conflict management between principals in the rural and urban areas and found that principals in the rural areas have more grasp of conflict management much more than their counterparts in the urban zones. This may be attributed to the population surge in the schools in the urban centres.

Adora (2010) carried out research on management team and conflict resolution and found set good.

Hallinger and Heck (1998) reviewed over 40 empirical studies conducted between 1980 and 1995. and concluded that principals exercised a measurable and statistically significant, though small, indirect impact on school effectiveness and student achievement.

Pibowei-Okubo (2019) asserted that boy school or girl school type does not necessarily impact on students conflict resolution; the approach is optional depending on the situation or circumstances surrounding the conflict.

Rahim (2009) asserts that conflict is a form of struggle to have one's own way or defend one's interest. The word conflict is synonymous to battle, fight, war, dispute, disagreement, struggle and clash. People use these various means to initiate actions that could help them to forcefully obtain whatever they want on one hand, and vehemently resist anything they detest on the other hand.

Similarly, Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003) found that school leadership does have a positive and noteworthy effect on student achievement and Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004) reported that effective school leadership substantially increases student achievement. Using a path analysis, Kruger, Witziers, and Slegers (2007) found that school leaders indirectly influence student outcomes and school culture.

Korkmaz (2007) stated, the principal is the key person in creating an ideal school. He examined the effects of leadership style (transformational and transactional) and teacher job satisfaction on organizational health using a Likert-type questionnaire with a sample of 635 Turkish teachers. The questionnaire included transformational and transactional leadership styles adapted from the (Bass & Avolio, 1985), an assessment of organizational health, and items related to job satisfaction. Korkmaz (2007) analyzed the data using path analysis to assess the relationships between the independent (leadership style) and dependent (teacher job satisfaction and organizational health) variables. The findings revealed that teachers preferred principals with transformational leadership styles. The findings also revealed that leadership style had profound effect on teacher job satisfaction. Teachers with high levels of job satisfaction contributed to healthy work environments, which directly affected their enthusiasm in working with students (Korkmaz, 2007).

Bass (1997), there is<sup>1</sup> universality in the transactional-transformational leadership paradigm in conflict management. That is, the same conception of phenomena and relationships can be observed in a wide range of organizations and cultures. Bass also stated, leadership that occurs is affected by the organizations and cultures in which it appears.

Conflict is instigated when disruptions occur in a normal group routine relationship. If not properly handled at this stage, various factions of divergent opinions begin to emanate. From this point, disagreement advances into conflict by the beliefs, actions and utterances of the opposing parties. To avoid a state of anarchy, this stage calls for an emergency resolution of the conflicts (Rahim, 2010).

## **Summary of Reviewed Literature**

Literature review in this study consists of both theoretical and empirical studies. From the theoretical



perspectives, there was only one type of mediation theory being taught and practiced, which is now being called "Facilitative Mediation". In facilitative mediation, the mediator structures a process to assist the parties in reaching a mutually agreeable resolution. The mediator asks questions; validates and normalizes parties' points of view; searches for interests underneath the positions taken by parties; and assists the parties in finding and analyzing options for resolution. The facilitative mediator does not make recommendations to the parties, he gives or her own advice or opinion as to the outcome of the case, or predict what a court would do in the case. The mediator is in charge of the process, while the parties are in charge of the outcome. Facilitative mediators want to ensure that parties come to agreements based on information and understanding.

Findings from one of the study revealed that conflict on gender was higher among females who had low abilities to control anxiety. Based on socio-economic status, conflict is a fight, expression of a disagreement with or dislike for what another person or party is doing or has done. Conflict is usually painful to either or the both parties involved. In marital status, conflict exist between two people like husband and wife, a father and son, friends, colleagues, superior and subordinate, and among people in a group, a class, school or even an entity like a club or church.

This study focused on the extent the principals, teachers and administrators use the Integrating, Compromising, Dominating and Avoiding strategies in the management of students' conflicts in the secondary schools, and their related implications in the internal school management. The study revealed that the principals use the integrating, compromising strategies than the teachers and administrators in the management of students' conflict.

## METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study was a descriptive survey research design method. It allowed the researcher to collect data, summarize, present and interpret findings about variables of subjects as they were found in social system, for the purpose of clarity and without manipulation. Nwankwo (2016) defined descriptive research as that method aimed at determining and reporting the way things are at a particular time of the study. The population of the study comprised of 516 senior and junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. The principals of both senior and junior secondary schools were chosen for the study. Source: ([www.prosharegn-com/news/Nigeria-economy/NBS.../30102](http://www.prosharegn-com/news/Nigeria-economy/NBS.../30102) in Rivers State 2018). The fluid survey sampling size method was used to determine the sample size. A sample of 320 principals of the total population was used for the study. A sample of principals obtained through the fluid-survey sampling method as earlier stated was 320. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 15 principals (respondents) from each of the 37 wards in Port Harcourt Metropolis viz, Obio/Akpor LGA (17) and Port Harcourt City LGAs (20) to arrive at 320 respondents while stratified sampling technique was used to select them according to gender, educational qualification, marital status, school type, and years of experience. The instrument for data collection in the study titled: Principals' Conflict Management Strategies Scale (PCMSS), was the researcher's self-made instrument rated at a 4-point Likert modified scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (DA) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was divided into two sections. Section A comprised the biographic data while Section B comprised the items statements response. The instrument was given to the researcher's supervisor and other experts in the department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counseling, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt to ascertain the degree of validity. This was to ensure that the item statements were clearly stated and that the instrument would measure what it was intended to measure. The reliability of the instrument was determined through the Cronbach alpha reliability method. Cronbach Alpha is a measure of internal consistency, that is, how closely related a set of items are as a group. It was considered to be a measure of scale reliability and shown below. The  $.929 > .71$  indicates that the instrument was highly reliable. Copies of the instrument were administered directly to the respondents by the researcher with the help of two research assistants. Instructions guiding the filling of the instrument was thoroughly explained to the respondents. The research questions were analyzed with the mean statistics and Standard deviation at the criterion mean of 2.5. The research hypotheses were tested using Independence t-test at significance level of 0.05.

## 4.0 DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the data analysis. Out of 320 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 300 or 92% were duly completed and returned. This study therefore is based on the analysis of the returned 300 copies of the questionnaire.

### Interpretation of Results

**Research Question 1:** What are management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on gender?

**Table 1: Summary of conflict management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on gender**

S/N	Items	Male Principal (n=132)	Female Principal (n=168)	Mean Set	Std. Deviation	Remark
1.	I plan to resolve conflicts as soon as it occurs	2.05	2.23	2.14	0.93	Disagreed
2.	I resolve student’s conflict after					Agreed
	Discussing with colleagues.	3.27	3.13	3.20	0.90	
3.	I discuss my students’ conflicts issues					Disagreed
	With my couple before taking decision.	2.20	2.05	2.13	0.96	
4.	I have ideas on how to manage students’ conflicts in my school irrespective of their gender.			3.40		Agreed
<b>Grand Mean</b>				<b>2.72</b>	<b>0.90</b>	

Table 1 above shows that in item 1 mean score is 2.14 and SD 0.93 which indicate that the female and male respondents disagreed that they resolve conflicts as soon as it occurs. In item 2 mean score of 3.20 and SD 0.90 equally showed that the respondents agreed that they resolve students’ conflicts after discussing with colleagues. In item 3 mean score of 2.13 and SD 0.96 equally showed that the respondents disagreed that they discuss the researcher’s students’ conflicts issues with researcher’s couple before taking decision and in item 4 mean score of 3.40 and SD 0.81 implies that the respondents agreed that male students are more prone to conflicts.

**Research Question 2:** What are management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on educational qualification?

**Table 2: Summary of conflict management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on educational qualification**

Descriptive Statistics						
S/N	Items	Male Principal (n=132)	Female Principal (n=168)	Mean Set	Std. Deviation	Remark
5.	1 resolve conflicts based on my training experience	2.04	2.10	2.07	1.04	Disagreed
6.	My academic qualification and training incorporates conflict resolution management					Disagreed
7.	1 adopt conflict resolution theories in resolving my students conflicts					Disagreed
8.	1 have enough skills as a principal, 1 do not need formal leadership training programmes to effectively resolve conflicts					Agreed
<b>Grand Mean</b>				<b>2.32</b>	<b>3.32</b>	

Table 3 above shows in item 5 mean score of 2.07 and SD 1.04 showing that the respondents disagreed that they resolve conflicts based on the researcher training experience. Item 6 shows that the respondents equally disagreed with mean score of 2.08 and SD 1.02 that their academic qualification and training incorporates conflict resolution management. In item 7 with mean score of 1.94 and SD 0.70 shows that the respondents disagreed that they adopt conflict resolution theories in resolving researcher’s students’ conflicts. While in item 8 mean score of 3.20 and SD 0.56 shows that the respondents agreed that they have enough skills as a principal, I do not need formal leadership training programmes to effectively resolve conflicts.

**Testing of Hypotheses**

The hypotheses have been tested using the t-test at the significance level of .05.

**Research Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference between conflict management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on gender.

**Table 3: Significance difference between conflict management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on gender**

	t	df	t-test for Equality of Means Sig. (2- Mean Std. Error tailed) Difference Difference			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper	
<b>Female Principal</b>	<b>0.138202</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>0.276</b>	<b>0.016369</b>	<b>0.104298</b>	<b>-0.18888</b>	<b>0.221622</b>
<b>Male Principal</b>	<b>0.148752</b>	<b>275,643</b>	<b>0.278</b>	<b>0.016369</b>	<b>0.104759</b>	<b>-0.18986</b>	<b>0.222602</b>
<b>Total</b>			<b>0.277</b>				

The result in table 3 showed that the Mean Difference and Standard Error Difference of female principals are 0.016 and 0.104 while male have a Mean Difference and Standard Error Difference of 0.016 and 0.105. The Independence samples t-test value is 0.27, this implies that  $p > 0.05$  and therefore is not significant. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected that there is no significant difference between conflict management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on gender.

**Research Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant difference between conflict management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on educational qualification.

**Table 8: Significance difference between conflict management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on educational qualification**

	t	df	t-test for Equality of Means Sig. (2- Mean Std. Error tailed) Difference Difference			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper	
<b>Considerably Educated</b>	<b>-0.04524</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>0.413</b>	<b>-0.03293</b>	<b>0.117816</b>	<b>-0.26521</b>	<b>0.199349</b>
<b>Moderately Educated</b>	<b>-0.04011</b>	<b>173.9188</b>	<b>0.419</b>	<b>-0.03293</b>	<b>0.119524</b>	<b>-0.26884</b>	<b>0.202984</b>
<b>Total</b>			<b>0.416</b>				

The result in table 8 showed that the Mean Difference and Standard Error Difference of considerably educated principals are -0.032 and 0.118 while moderately educated have a Mean Difference and Standard Error Difference of -0.032 and 0.120. The Independence samples t-test value is 0.42, this implies that  $p > 0.05$  and therefore is not significant. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected that there is no significant difference between conflict management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on educational qualification.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of the above findings are hereby discussed: The opinion of the female and male principals (respondents) is that both male and female principals may apply same strategies in handling students' conflict. The position of the respondents is aligned by Moran (2001) stating that conflict management is 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 as a concept never remain positive or negative but it has always been seen as a basic and result oriented part of school life. Conflicts offer competitive as well as cooperative context in the organization but it varies according to the situation. Problems exist in managing conflicts when the context is competitive/individualistic or when the context and the conflict resolution procedures are incongruent. The effectiveness of a conflict resolution and peer mediation program may be limited when the classroom and school context is competitive.

The possible sources of conflict are poor communication, competition for common but scarce resources, incompatible goals and the like. Fisher (2007) reveals that both individuals and groups have undeniable needs for identity, dignity, security, equity, participation in decisions that affect them. Frustration of these basic needs... becomes a source of social conflict. Plunkett and Attner (2009), the sources of conflict include; shared resources, differences in goals, difference in perceptions and values, disagreements in the role requirements, nature of work activities, individual approaches, and the stage of organizational development. The position of the scholars reveal that strategies for handling conflict is individual, contingent and does not necessarily have to do with the act being a male or female.

The position of the respondents indicates that educational qualifications of the respondents do not have any link in their handling of students' conflicts. The position of the respondents is argued by Pibowei-Okubo (2018) stating that certain measures or controls are not provided by higher education leaderships, education may likely equip people to become more effective vandals on the earth. This could be due to the trends of conflicts among the numerous students, staff and secondary school community. Therefore, it may be needful to weigh the significance of secondary school education and the processes of delivering its goals against emerging conflicts, as well as measure its merits and demerits. Pibowei-Okubo (2019) asserted that educational qualification of the principal does not necessarily impact on students

conflict resolution; the approach is optional depending on the situation or circumstances surrounding the conflict. Nevertheless, she went further to state that several conflicts within the secondary school system can undo the goals it is expected to achieve if not passionately guarded. Management of secondary schools and the various stakeholders must possess strategies to combat any issue that can mar the processes of delivering the goals of secondary school education.

The respondents are of the opinion that management of students conflict does not matter whether the handler is married or not. The position of the respondents is buttressed by Sanda (1992), disclosing that academic freedom means freedom to organize the secondary school, design and teach courses, associate with others, do research, prepare materials for teaching, exchange and hold ideas without any fear of harassment, contradiction or victimization and challenge all in pursuit of truth and does not relate to marital status. It could also mean freedom to perform one's role or pursue one's career as a secondary school administrator or an academic staff (within the work regulation, policy or provision) without being internally or externally constrained, intimidated or prohibited. Hence, an attempt by one party to exercise control over some activities that another party regards as its domain can lead to conflict. Conflicts break out when academic freedom is tampered with. Several administrators of secondary schools in treaty revolt against any government that attempts to impede their autonomy or have them fully controlled (Ololube, 2018).

## 5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### Summary

This study examined conflict management strategies of principals' in resolving students' conflicts in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The findings of the study based on the tested hypotheses are summarized thus:

1. There is no significant difference between conflict management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on gender. Research question one provided various strategies of principals in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference between conflict management strategies of principals in resolving conflicts among secondary school students in Port Harcourt metropolis based on educational qualification. Research question one showed that most of the respondents disagreed with the strategies adopted by principals in the schools.

### CONCLUSION

The study explored various strategies adopted by principals in handling students conflicts in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The educational qualification of the principals in handling students conflicts did not play a major role since most of the respondents relied on their experiences in the job in handling students' conflict. The gender of the respondent did not matter as most of the handling strategies of students' conflicts lunged on contingencies and nature of conflict. The respondents showed that their marital experiences played a role in their ability to handle students' conflicts in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. School type and marital status did not matter whether the school is mixed, boys/girls or the handler is married or not.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations have been reached:

1. Principals should adopt the most optimal approach in handling students' conflicts in order to forestall occurrences.
2. There should be seminar or conferences for school principals at intermittent periods on conflict resolutions both for staff and students.
3. Principals should from time to time be given a forum to share their experiences of how they handle conflicts of their teenagers or how such experiences bear in their handling of conflicts in their various schools.
4. The general causes of conflicts should be nipped on the bud since conflict is no respecter of location.
5. Social status of both the students and staff should not be allowed to interfere in the interest of others from lower status. Government and other agencies should engage the people front time to time on people management and conflict management techniques.

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