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A Correlation Study on Conflict Management Styles and Teachers' Productivity in Public Secondary Schools in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between conflict management styles and teachers' productivity in public secondary schools in Adamawa state, Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 1,528 teachers from public secondary schools situated in the five educational zones in the state. A self structured instrument entitled "Conflict Management Styles and Teachers' Productivity" (CMSTP) was used to gather data for the study. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Teachers most frequently used collaborating style ($\bar{X}=3.1$) during conflict situations. Accommodating ($r = 0.07$; $p < 0.05$), collaborating ($r = 0.32$; $p < 0.05$) and compromising ($r = 0.10$; $p < 0.05$) styles were significantly related to teachers' productivity. Competing style ($r = -0.01$; $p > 0.05$) and avoiding style ($r = 0.04$; $p > 0.05$) were not significantly related to teachers' productivity. Thus, teachers should be adequately exposed to conflict dynamics and its management approaches so as to make them more proactive in handling conflicts for better performance in their schools.

Key words: conflict, conflict management styles, teachers productivity, public secondary school

Introduction

The relevance of teachers' productivity to educational growth and development cannot be overemphasized. This perhaps accounts for why it has become an integral component of educational reform programmes of nations across the globe. According to Cheng, Tam and

Tsui (2002), reforms and initiatives in the last two decades aim to improve teacher performance. Similarly, Kaplan and Owings (2004) observed that improving teacher effectiveness has become the centre of educational reform. In Nigeria, several educational reforms such as U.P.E 1976; National Policy on Education 1977; and U.B.E 1999 have been implemented, in which the improvement of teachers' quality and performance were considered as central issues. Despite this development, however, research findings have revealed that the productivity of teachers is still considerably low in the country. For instance, Obanya (2004) asserted that low morale of teachers has led to low performance in the later part of 20th century in Nigeria. Onyene (2001) also reported that Nigerian teachers have lost job dedication, and devotion, and are not enthused about the teaching career. This ugly development is characterised by a number of factors which may be internal or external to the school system in the country. According to Akiri and Ugborugbo (2008), low productivity of teachers is associated with a number of factors, which include: teachers' gender, marital status, academic attainment, teaching experience and age. Briseid and Caillods (2004) linked low teacher morale to working conditions such as workload, number of pupils' per class and the school environment, as well as the lack of opportunity for teachers development and promotion, the support teachers receive in schools, their degree of autonomy and, naturally, their salaries. Cetin and Hacifazlioglu (2004) were of the opinion that constructive conflict stimulates people towards greater work efforts, cooperation and creativity. Mayer (1995) submitted that lack of proficient conflict management has a pervasive detrimental impact on productivity and career fulfilment.

The assertions of Cetin and Hacifazlioglu (2004) and Mayer (1995) suggested that poor handling of conflict can impair the job performance behaviours of the individuals within an organisation. Apart from this, conflict is considered as the most volatile factor that can thwart the productivity of individual workers among the arrays of factors enumerated. The fact that conflict can create "a pervasive detrimental impact on productivity and career fulfilment" (Mayer, 1995) validates the fact that conflict can distort individual as well as organisational productivity. For instance, Adeola (2003) averred that no meaningful development could take place in a crisis-ridden system torn apart by conflicts as witnessed in secondary schools today.

Perry and McDaniel (2003) observed that what is more frightening is that conflict in today's schools can be detrimental to existing opportunities for teachers to teach and students to learn in a caring and safe environment. These observations point to the fact that conflict is a major factor that can distort and thwart teachers' productivity. Therefore, teachers' productivity is a function of how conflicts are perceived and managed by staff and students in any given school. Whitfield (1994) asserted that conflict might cause a great deal of injury and/or a great deal of good, depending on the management style of an organization. Effective management of conflict can lead to outcomes that are productive and enhance the health of the organization; ineffective management of conflict frequently creates a climate that exacerbates the situation and is likely to develop a downward spiral of mounting frustration, deteriorating organizational climate, and increasing destructiveness (Owens, 1998). The conflict management styles adopted to mitigate conflict have bearing on the productivity level of workers. In organizations where conflicts are mismanaged, Fiore (2000) observed that there will be decreased productivity, increased stress among employees, hampered performance, high turnover rate and absenteeism.

It is therefore imperative to note that escalated or uncontrolled conflicts in schools are associated with faulty or ineffective conflict management styles and these effects on teachers are usually severe. When conflict management styles are well thought out and appropriately

applied to mitigate conflict, it will breathe life and energy into relationships and can cause individuals to be much more innovative and productive (Uline, Tschannen-Moran & Perez, 2003). In Adamawa state, teachers in secondary schools experience various forms of conflict. Opeloye (2006) posited that the causative factors of these conflicts are: rumour mongering, domineering attitude of principals, communication breakdown, resources problem and lack of opportunities for promotion.

Similarly, Alimba and Fabunmi (2011) found that violation of school rules and regulations, indiscipline, lateness, unclear definition of responsibilities for teachers, principals' poor management behaviour, and poor distribution of available school materials for teaching and learning are largely responsible for conflicts in secondary schools in Adamawa State. These conflict triggers point to the fact that school personnel, especially teachers, are highly deficient in conflict knowledge, which consequently paves the way for conflicts to occur frequently in the system, especially when emerging conflicts are misperceived and handled. Misperception and poor handling of conflicts are purely based on the level of conflict knowledge acquired overtime by people. Given this scenario, teachers' productivity will be greatly impeded leading to low-level performance in students and poor quality education. In view of this, the symptoms of poor performance of students and low quality of education evident in the educational system in Adamawa State are the direct consequences of teachers' low productivity. This study, therefore, thrusts the condition of low productivity of teachers on poor handling of emerging conflicts in the school system.

Research Problem

The educational system is seemingly a conflict brewing industry. This is because of the complexity of its composition. Its mixed grill of people from different backgrounds, having divergent opinions, goals, needs and aspirations attest to the fact that conflict would be an inherent component of the system. This makes it paramount, therefore, for educational personnel, especially teachers, to be exposed to conflicts and its management approaches for effective and efficient operations in schools. Lippitt (1982) indicated that conflict management in schools commanded nearly 49% of the attention of school officials as compared to 24% in other management positions in other organizations. This implies that conflict is an ever-present phenomenon in the school system, and that it is more pervasive in the system than in any other social organization (Alimba & Fabunmi, 2011). Therefore, the problem statement stems from the fact that since teachers are hardly ever exposed to the rudiments of conflict dynamics and its management approaches, there is the tendency for them to misperceive emerging conflict and apply inappropriate conflict management styles. When this happens, conflict emergence will increase, ongoing conflict becomes complex and conflict level will rise, and teachers' productivity will be jeopardized. Based on this, the following research question and hypothesis will guide the study to determine the correlational impact of the conflict variables:

- (i) What are the conflict management styles often employed by teachers to mitigate conflict in public secondary school in Adamawa state?
- (ii) H01: Conflict management styles (e.g., competing, accommodating, collaborating, avoiding and compromising) do not make any significant relative contributions to teachers' productivity in public secondary in Adamawa State.

Literature Review

Conflict is part and parcel of the human experience. It is a social phenomenon that is both natural and inevitable. Chinwokwu (2013) defined conflict as a friction which may exists

whenever two or more persons come into social relationship or interaction with one another. It is an inevitable and unavoidable part of human experience rooted in incompatible activities of individuals and groups. Rahim (2002) considered conflict as an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e. individual, group, organization, etc.). It is glaring from the definitions above that conflict is an inescapable element in social relations, which occurs when the interactions of people are marked with differences in goals, perceptions, attitudes, views, beliefs, values or needs (Alimba, 2014). These definitions also revealed that conflict cannot occur in isolation. The parties to a conflict must be connected by some sort of social ties. The nature of these ties will determine the degree of conflict that will exist in the relationship and consequently the intensity of conflict manifestation in it.

Coser and Rosenberg (1964) submitted that the closer the group, the more intense the conflict. Therefore, the level of conflict intensity in a relationship will be reflected in its outcome. The outcome of a conflict episode can either be positive or negative in nature. Whichever outcome that emerges, it has the capacity to influence people's efficiency. Conflict outcome depends on how people perceive and manage conflict. Conflict management consists of interventions designed to reduce excessive conflict or in some instances to increase insufficient conflict (Hellriegel & Slocum (1996). This means that conflict management is essential in order to trim down conflict where they are too much and to ensure that they are moderately present where they absent so as to prevent stagnation, stimulate creativity and cause change to occur in social relations. It involves designing effective macro-level strategies to minimize the dysfunctions of conflict and enhancing the constructive functions of conflicts in order to enhance learning and effectiveness in an organization (Rahim, 2002. It is clear that the goal of conflict management is to reduce conflict intensity to a bearable level where it can become useful force in improving social relationship and stimulating organizational development. Conflict management therefore entails ensuring a minimum level of conflict in an organization, so as to keep it viable, innovative and creative. In order to achieve this, appropriate conflict management styles should be adopted at all times. The use of appropriate style is a crucial factor in constructively handling conflict in any situation. Gumuselli and Hacifazlioglu, 2009) submitted that conflict management therefore involves the diagnosis of and intervention in conflict with the appropriate styles and strategies in order to accomplish organizational and individual goals. Therefore, Conflict management styles are patterned responses or clusters of behaviour that people use in conflict through diverse communication tactics (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001). Copley (2008) defined conflict management style as behavioural orientation of how to approach and handle conflict, with individuals choosing a pattern of principles to guide them through the conflict process. Conflict management styles are also a general and consistent orientation toward the other party and the conflict issues, manifest in observable behaviours that form a pattern and share common characteristics over time (Kuhn & Poole, 2000). Hocker & Wilmot (1985) raised some assumptions about conflict management styles:

- (i) People develop patterned response to conflict
- (ii) People develop conflict styles for reasons that make sense to them
- (iii) No one style is automatically better than another.
- (iv) People's styles undergo change in order to adapt to the demands of new situations.

The point is that no matter the status, position and degree at which one is operating, conflict management styles are influenced by situational and dispositional factors. This is the reason

for the variations in the utilization of the styles. Researchers have identified various conflict management styles that can be adopted by people to mitigate conflict. Follett (1940) was the first to suggest three main styles of managing conflict, namely: domination, compromise and integration. She later added two other styles, which are: avoidance and suppression, bringing the total number of styles to five.

Deutsch (1949) developed a classification of conflict management styles which is centred on a simple dichotomy of cooperation-competition. This classification of Deutsch (1949) was based on the idea that conflict is an incompatible interaction between two individuals, where one is interfering, obstructing or in other ways making the behaviour of another less effective. He concluded that the outcome of a conflict episode depends on how the conflict is handled, either cooperatively or competitively. Deutsch's (1949) idea did not gain much popularity in its usage to interpret individual's styles of handling conflicts. This was a result of doubts over the ability of the dichotomy to reflect the complexity of an individual's perceptions of conflict behaviour (Ruble & Thomas, 1976).

Based on the classification of Mary, P. Follett (1940), Blake and Mouton (1964) developed a two dimension grid, which evolved into five conflict handling styles, namely: forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising and problem-solving. The two-dimension grid of Blake and Mouton (1964) was actually used to categorize the attitudes of managers into concern for production and concern for people. Hence, they argued that managers using the problem-solving style had high concern for productivity and people; those using the forcing style showed high concern for productivity and low concern for people; managers employing the compromising style indicated moderate concern for productivity and people; those using the smoothing style showed low concern for productivity and high concern for people and managers using the withdrawal style had low concern for productivity and low concern for people. Thomas and Kilmann (1974) used the ideas of Blake and Mouton (1964) to develop a model for managing conflict based on competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising and collaborating. Thomas (1976) lucidly explained the model on the basis of two-dimensions of behaviour: assertiveness and cooperativeness. Assertiveness is an attempt by an individual to satisfy one's own concerns, while cooperativeness shows a situation whereby an individual attempts to satisfy the concerns of other of people. The model is shown in Figure 1.

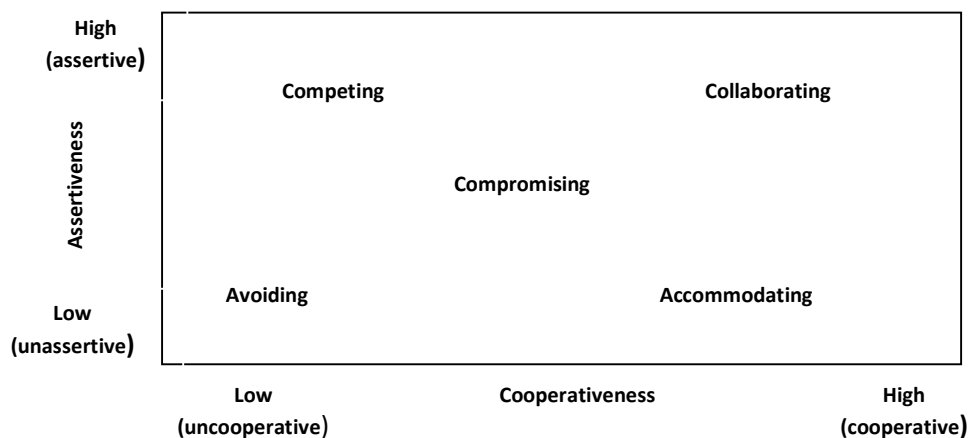


Figure 1: Thomas-Kilmann Model of Conflict Management Styles. Adapted from Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument by K.W.Thomas and R.H. Kilmann, 1974

Figure 1 showed that competing and avoiding are stationary at the horizontal axis, which indicates assertive behaviour; and the accommodating and collaborating styles are represented at the vertical axis, signifying cooperative behaviour. Compromising is located at the intermediate level of both assertive and cooperative behaviours. These conflict styles show how people strive to satisfy their own concern under the assertive dimension, and the degree to which they attempt to satisfy the concern of others in the cooperative dimension. In discussing the styles, one will discover that the avoiding style is unassertive and uncooperative. The style is low in assertive and low in cooperative. It is a lose-lose mode and has been described as a decision not to decide. According to Rahim (2002), the avoiding style has been associated with withdrawal, buck passing or sidestepping situations. A person who uses the avoiding style fails to satisfy his or her own concerns as well as the concerns of the other party. Lee (2008) explained that this style is useful when the issues are trivial or when the potential dysfunctional effect of confronting the other party outweighs the benefits of resolving the conflict.

The competing style is assertive and uncooperative. It is a win-lose style. It emphasizes that a person tries to satisfy his own concerns and disregards the concerns of other people. Connelly (1998) stated that this style is a power-oriented style, in which one uses whatever power seems appropriate to win one's position. Rahim (2002) argued that this style is appropriate when the issues involved in a conflict are important to the person or an unfavourable decision by other person may be harmful to this person. The accommodating style is cooperative and unassertive.

This approach ends in lose-win outcome. The accommodating style involves a situation in which an individual neglects his/her own concerns to satisfy the concern of the other person (Connelly, 1998). People using this style give in to demands, even unreasonable ones, in order to avoid disagreement (Tonsing, 2005). The compromising style is half assertive and half cooperative. It results in a no-win/no-lose or win-lose-win-lose outcome. Copley (2008) observed that compromising style is associated with an intermediate level of concern for both self and others. This style typically involves give and take, where both parties involved relinquish some of what they want in order to arrive at a mutually acceptable decision (Copley, 2008). This method of resolving conflict puts the conflicting parties on the verge of being satisfied with their demands because both parties will let go certain measures of their demands to come to agreement. The collaborating style is both assertive and cooperative. The conflicting parties:

work with each other to find a solution that is satisfactory to both of them. It is about dialogue in which the parties listen actively and gain understanding of the other party as well as their own. That understanding enables them to develop a solution that satisfies the concern of both parties (Ojiji, 2006, p.122).

Hence, collaborating style results in win-win outcome. The collaborating style encourages mutual respect, open communication and full participation by all parties (Supping and Jing, 2006). Therefore, the nature of conflict style employed to mitigate conflict is one of the most important factors in effective and constructive management of conflict in any organizational setup. Any of the styles adopted can either cause conflict to decline, thereby improving the work environment and productivity of workers or cause conflict to rise, making the work environment tense and uncondusive for optimal productivity of workers. Research on conflict management styles has indicated that styles such as collaborating, accommodating and compromising have significant correlation with teachers' satisfaction, while the avoiding style is negatively correlated with teachers' satisfaction (Tumwesigye, 2008). Renwick (1972)

submitted that subordinates perceive relationships with superiors as productive when collaboration is employed. Therefore, conflict management styles have the tendency to positively or negatively influence the work behaviour of people, especially teachers in the educational system. When the relationship is positive, teachers' productivity, efficiency and effectiveness will raise, leading to greater performance in students and the growth of education in a country. Also, negative relationship will result in low performance in teachers, which will adversely affect students and the system in general.

Research Methodology

The study adopted an ex-post-facto survey research design. The design will enabled the researcher to identify the conflict management styles of teachers and determine how they are related to teachers' productivity in public secondary schools in the State. The population of the study was comprised of 6,385 teachers in Adamawa state. A sample of 1,528 teachers from five educational zones in the state was selected through multi-stage sampling techniques. The study sample represented 25% of the total population. A questionnaire titled "Conflict Management Styles and Teachers Productivity Questionnaire" (CMSTPQ) was used to collect the data for analysis. The questionnaire captured the thematic areas of the study. The first part described information on the demographics of the respondents. This covers variables such as gender, age work experience, educational qualification, and marital status. The second part dealt with the conflict management styles that teachers can adopt to manage conflict in school. Also, there is a section that was devoted to teachers' productivity in the questionnaire. It contained variable that help to determine the productiveness of teachers, and its connection with conflict management styles. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used to analyse the data collected in the course of the study.

Results

The results of the study were presented and interpreted, as shown in Table 1 and 2.

Research Question: What are the conflict management styles often employed by teachers in mitigating conflicts in public secondary school in Adamawa state?

Table 1: Conflict Management Styles of Teachers

Variable	\bar{X}	SD
Competing	2.55	1.058
Accommodating	2.47	1.005
Collaborating	3.01	0.952
Compromising	2.42	1.021
Avoiding	2.35	1.007

The conflict management style most frequently employed by teachers was the collaborating style ($\bar{X}=3.1$), this is followed by the competing style ($\bar{X}=2.55$), the accommodating style ($\bar{X}=2.47$), the compromising style ($\bar{X}=2.42$), and in last place, the avoiding style ($\bar{X}=2.35$). Based on the styles that are frequently used by teachers, we conclude that public secondary school teachers tend to be cooperative (i.e., collaborating) and assertive (i.e., competing) in Adamawa state.

Research Hypothesis: Conflict management styles (i.e. competing, accommodating, collaborating, avoiding and compromising) do not make any significant relative contributions to teachers' productivity in public secondary in Adamawa state.

Table 2: Relative Contributions of Conflict Management Styles to Teachers' Productivity

Item	Competing	Accommodating	Collaborating	Avoiding	Compromising	Teachers' Productivity
Competing	1 1527					
Accommodating	0.349* 0.000 1527	1 1527				
Collaborating	0.004 0.865 1527	0.098* 0.000 1527	1 1527			
Avoiding	0.339* 0.000 1527	0.339* 0.000 1527	0.037 0.151 1527	1 1527		
Compromising	0.269* 0.000 1527	0.289* 0.000 1527	0.184* 0.000 1527	0.273* 0.000 1527	1 1527	
Teachers' Productivity	-0.011 0.67 1527	0.076 0.003 1527	0.325* 0.000 1527	0.042 0.101 1527	0.107 0.000 1527	1 1527

Table 2 presents a correlation matrix of the relative contributions of conflict management styles to teachers' productivity. The study discovered that accommodating style ($r = 0.076$; $p < 0.05$), collaborating style ($r = 0.325$; $p < 0.05$) and compromising style ($r = 0.107$; $p < 0.05$) were significantly correlated with teachers' productivity. The competing style ($r = -0.011$; $p > 0.05$) and avoiding style ($r = 0.042$; $p > 0.05$) were not significantly related to teachers' productivity. This indicated that there is a positive correction between those styles and teachers productivity in secondary schools. The competing and avoiding styles are negatively correlated with teachers' productivity in secondary schools.

Discussion of Findings

Teachers most frequently used the collaborating style ($\bar{X} = 3.1$); they use the avoiding style ($\bar{X} = 2.35$) least. These findings conform to the research works of Ikoya and Akinseide (2009) and Baser and Kaya (2010). Ikoya and Akinseide (2009) found that in secondary schools, bargaining (i.e., collaborating) is the highest used style by teachers, while avoiding is the least used, followed by forcing (i.e., competing). Baser and Kaya (2010) reported that teachers of age bracket of 30–39 and 40 years and above emphasized "collaboration" style as the most effective conflict handling style. In the present study, the accommodating style ($r = 0.076$; $p < 0.05$), collaborating style ($r = 0.325$; $p < 0.05$) and compromising style ($r = 0.107$; $p < 0.05$) were significantly related to teachers' productivity, while the competing style ($r = 0.011$; $p > 0.05$) and avoiding style ($r = 0.042$; $p > 0.05$) were not significantly related to teachers' productivity. The results indicated that the conflict management style adopted to resolve conflict could positively or negatively impact on teachers' productivity. The findings of the study are in congruence with the findings of Byers (1987) and Hajzus (1990). Byers

(1987) discovered that the use of cooperative conflict resolution styles by principals positively impact on teachers' commitment. Hajzus (1990) had found that an imposing or withdrawing (i.e., avoiding) resolution style from principals was negatively related to the organizational commitment of teachers. Likewise, Tumwesigye (2008) equally found that collaborating, accommodating and compromising were positively correlated with teachers' satisfaction, while avoiding style is insignificant to teachers' satisfaction. Hence, conflict management styles are potent determinants of teachers' productivity in secondary schools.

Conclusion

The growth and development of any educational system depends on the quality and quantity of teachers available for utilisation in the school level. Equally, the exposure of teachers to current issues in educational development is a sure way of preparing them for possible future challenges and achievement of educational goals. One of such issues which teachers should be exposed to compulsorily in this era is conflict management education. Conflict management is a necessary skill because of the inherent complexities in school administration. The complex nature of school administration has made schools readily susceptible to conflict; if teachers are not properly trained in conflict dynamics, their productive capabilities may be jeopardised. This will spell doom for students' academic performance and subsequently prevent the achievement of the goals of the educational system. Based on this, the present study investigated the relationship between conflict management styles and teachers' productivity in public secondary schools. The conflict management styles of teachers were discovered and the relationship between conflict management styles and teachers' productivity were also determined. Therefore, it is imperative to note that nothing is wrong with the existence of conflicts in the school arena, but what is wrong is to allow emerging conflicts to escalate into full-scale affective conflicts capable of causing havoc to the system. This is where the nature of conflict management style adopted by conflicting parties becomes paramount. The style adopted can either significantly influence teachers' productivity positively or negatively, with attendant consequences on the quality of the educational system in a country. Therefore, considering the importance of teachers' productivity in achieving a sustainable educational system, the following recommendations become imperative:

- Compulsory inclusion of conflict management education in the curricula of teacher training institutions such as the faculties of education, colleges of education, e.t.c., to enable student's teachers to be exposed to the nature and dynamics of school conflict and its management approaches.
- The state governments in conjunction with their educational ministries should make sure that early warning signals are built in schools so that emerging conflict can be resolved before it graduates into full blown affective conflict.
- Conflict management styles or strategies should be incorporated into teachers' in-service training programmes in order to train them in conflict dynamics and how to deal with conflict constructively when they emerge in their schools.
- Qualified senior teachers' exposure to conflict management training should form a core issue in the criteria for promotion to principalship in the country.

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