

Conflict Management Strategies for Efficient Organization of Secondary School Teachers in Awka-South Local Government Area of Anambra State

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Abstract

Conflicts not only negatively impact the well-being and job satisfaction of teachers but apparently jeopardize the overall performance of secondary school students. This assertion necessitated the research work which determined conflict management strategies for the efficient organization of secondary school teachers in Awka-South Local Government Area, Anambra State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and guided by three research questions. The population comprised 542 senior secondary school teachers from 20 public schools. A random sampling technique was used to select 120 participants (teachers) for the study. A researcher-structured questionnaire on a 4-point rating scale validated by 3 experts with the reliability coefficient of 0.84 obtained by Cronbach Alpha coefficient was used for data collection. The research questions were answered using mean, with a cut-off score of 2.50. The findings revealed that collaborative approaches include open dialogue, team-building, and joint problem-solving as well as compromising and accommodating strategies among others were considered effective in managing conflicts. It was concluded that application of such strategies could foster effective conflict management in schools. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that school authorities should introduce or encourage reward system to enable teachers to embrace dialogue.

Keywords: Conflict, Efficient, Management, Organization, Strategies

Introduction

Education has long been recognized as a cornerstone for social and economic advancement in Nigeria, with secondary schools playing a pivotal role within the national education system. This phase of education serves as a crucial transitional period where students build upon foundational knowledge from primary school while preparing for higher education and future careers (Ogunsanya, 2019). According to the Federal Ministry of Education (2013), secondary education is designed to foster students' intellectual, moral, and physical development, thereby equipping them with the skills necessary to become productive members of society.

Beyond academics, Nigerian secondary schools serve as vital spaces for shaping students' character and nurturing their personal growth. Adolescence, which coincides with secondary schooling, is marked by profound physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. As such, secondary schools provide a structured environment that supports holistic development,

fostering life skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making considered skills essential for both academic and real-life challenges (Olaleye, 2014).

This developmental period is also enriched through students' participation in co-curricular and extracurricular activities such as debates, arts, sports, and community service. These engagements help students explore their interests, develop a sense of identity, and form aspirations that align with their talents and goals (Adigun & Ojediran, 2017; World Bank, 2020). However, the effectiveness of these opportunities is largely contingent upon the capacity of secondary school teachers to create supportive and engaging learning environments. Teachers not only transmit knowledge but also serve as mentors who influence students' values, attitudes, and aspirations (Zajda, 2018). Empirical evidence suggests that the quality of teacher organization and management significantly influences educational outcomes (Kyriakides, Christoforou & Charalambous, 2013). Efficiently organized teachers are better able to deliver high-quality instruction and foster strong teacher-student relationships. Meanwhile, institutional support through professional development, resource availability, and administrative efficiency further enhances teacher morale, job satisfaction, and instructional effectiveness (Ekeocha & Nwana, 2018; Anumba & Maduwesi, 2019).

However, one persistent challenge in the organizational landscape of Nigerian secondary schools is the management of conflicts among teachers. Conflicts may arise due to differences in teaching approaches, competition over limited resources, interpersonal disagreements, or administrative decisions (Olatoye & Abioye, 2018). Unresolved conflicts can negatively impact teacher morale, reduce collaboration, and strain both professional relationships and teacher-student dynamics (Omeje, 2017; Ibezim & Okoli, 2017).

To address these challenges, educational institutions must adopt effective conflict management strategies, particularly focusing on competitive, collaborative, and compromising approaches. Each of these strategies offers a unique pathway to resolving disputes: competitive strategies emphasize assertiveness and self-interest; collaborative strategies seek mutually beneficial outcomes through open communication; and compromising strategies aim for middle-ground solutions where each party makes concessions. The application and effectiveness of these strategies can have significant implications for the school climate, teacher performance, and ultimately, student achievement. Effective conflict management not only mitigates tensions but also enhances teacher job satisfaction, reduces stress, and promotes positive interpersonal dynamics among staff. A harmonious work environment encourages greater professional commitment, enthusiasm for teaching, and stronger teacher-student relationships; factors that are directly linked to improved student learning outcomes and overall well-being of the education system (World Bank, 2018; Olaleye, 2014). Against the foregoing backdrop, this study examined competitive, collaborative, and compromising conflict strategies for efficient organization of teachers in secondary schools in the study area.

Statement of the Problem

In today's increasingly interconnected and diverse workplaces, conflicts are an inevitable part of organizational dynamics. The presence of differing viewpoints, cultural backgrounds, and personality traits can lead to misunderstandings and disputes. Effective conflict management is crucial for maintaining productivity, fostering teamwork, and ensuring a harmonious work environment. This study investigated three distinct conflict management strategies for efficient organization of teachers, namely: competitive, collaborative and compromising.

The competitive strategy, characterized by a win-lose approach, often pits one party directly against another. This method may result in short-term gains for one individual but can foster resentment and lead to a toxic work environment. A competitive mindset can hinder open communication and collaboration among team members, ultimately stifling innovation and reducing overall job satisfaction. Despite its potential for immediate resolution, the long-term implications of a competitive approach warrant examination, particularly regarding how it affects interpersonal relationships and group cohesion.

Conversely, the collaborative strategy promotes a win-win approach, encouraging parties to work together to find mutually beneficial solutions. This approach emphasizes understanding and integrating diverse perspectives, which can lead to more innovative and effective outcomes. However, it requires a significant investment of time and emotional energy, and might not always be feasible in high-pressure or time-sensitive situations. The compromising strategy seeks a middle ground where both parties give up something to reach an agreement. While it can provide quicker resolutions than collaboration, compromising may also lead to suboptimal outcomes where neither party feels completely satisfied. This strategy's effectiveness varies across different contexts, and it raises questions about whether it encourages future conflict or promotes a cooperative atmosphere. Understanding the nuances associated with compromising is vital for developing a well-rounded approach to conflict management in organizations.

Despite the recognition of these conflict management strategies, empirical research examining their effectiveness within organizational conflict remains limited. This study aimed to fill that gap by systematically x-raying competitive, collaborative and compromising strategies capable of promoting efficiency and harmonious relations among secondary school teachers in the area. This further bridged the gap in knowledge in this perspective.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine conflict management strategies for the efficient organization of secondary school teachers in Awka-South Local Government Area, Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

1. Competitive conflict management strategies for efficient organization of secondary school teachers in Awka-South Local Government Area, Anambra State.

2. Collaborative conflict management strategies for efficient organization of secondary school teachers in Awka-South Local Government Area, Anambra State.
3. Compromising conflict management strategies for efficient organization of secondary school teachers in Awka-South Local Government Area, Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the competitive conflict management strategies that could enhance efficient organisation of secondary school teachers in Awka-South Local Government Area, Anambra State?
2. What are the collaborative conflict management strategies that could enhance efficient organisation of secondary school teachers in Awka-South Local Government Area, Anambra State?
3. What are the compromising conflict management strategies that could enhance efficient organisation of secondary school teachers in Awka-South Local Government Area, Anambra State?

Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. According to Nworgu (2015), the descriptive survey is one in which a group of people and items are studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people considered to be representatives of the entire group. The study was conducted in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State, which is made up of nine towns, namely, Amawbia, Awka, Ezinato, Isiagu, Mbaukwu, Nibo, Nise, Okpuno, and Umuawulu. The people are well known for education, farming, commerce and industry (both small, medium and large-scale industries). The population consisted of all the five hundred and forty-two (542) teachers randomly selected from 12 schools out of the 20 public secondary schools in the area (Post Primary School Services Commission (PPSSC), 2023). A stratified sampling was used to obtain the sample size of one hundred and twenty (120) teachers used for the study.

The instrument for data collection was 18-item researcher-structured questionnaire on a 4-point Likert rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was validated by experts while its reliability coefficient was ascertained using Cronbach Alpha reliability test which yielded 0.84. The researchers with the help of two research assistants distributed one hundred and twenty copies of the questionnaires to the respondents in their various schools and retrieved same after two weeks which makes a 100% return rate. Data collected were analyzed using mean statistics and decision on agreement and disagreement of items were based on mean cut off mark of 2.50 from the rating scale. Thus, items with mean score of 2.50 and above were considered agreed while those below 2.50 disagreed.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the competitive conflict management strategies that influence the efficient organization of secondary school teachers in Awka-South Local Government Area, Anambra State?

Table 1: Summary of Mean response on competitive conflict management strategies that influence efficient organization of secondary school teachers

S/N	competitive conflict management strategies	$\bar{x}$	Remark
1	Encouraging teachers to be assertive in defending their viewpoints improves problem-solving.	3.49	Agreed
2	Regularly scheduled debates foster a spirit of healthy competition among teachers.	2.91	Agreed
3	Setting clear performance targets minimizes ambiguity and reduces conflicts.	3.34	Agreed
4	Rewarding the most effective solutions can motivate teachers to address conflicts promptly.	3.58	Agreed
5	Tracking individual teacher achievements contributes to transparency in conflict situations.	3.45	Agreed
6	Winning an argument contributes to better conflict resolution in our school.	3.26	Agreed
Grand Mean		3.34	Agreed

The Table 1 revealed the mean responses of the respondents on research question 1. The finding showed that all the respondents agreed that encouraging teachers to be assertive in defending their viewpoints, regularly scheduled debates, setting clear performance targets, rewarding the most effective solutions, tracking individual teacher's achievements and winning an argument are competitive conflict management strategies that influence the efficient organization of secondary school teachers in Awka-South Local Government Area. The result gave a grand mean score of 3.30, which implied that the respondents agreed to the aforementioned strategies.

Research Question 2: What are the collaborative conflict management strategies that influence the efficient organization of secondary school teachers in Awka-South Local Government Area, Anambra State?

Table 2: Mean response on collaborative conflict management strategies that influence efficient organisation of secondary school teachers

S/N	collaborative conflict management strategies	$\bar{x}$	Remark
1	Promoting open dialogue fosters mutual understanding and resolves conflicts.	3.54	Agreed
2	Team-building activities enhance collaboration and decrease confrontations among teachers.	3.57	Agreed

3	Joint problem-solving sessions lead to more lasting solutions to conflicts.	3.48	Agreed
4	Encouraging empathy among staff members helps in acknowledging different perspectives	3.21	Agreed
5	Implementing a mentoring system contributes to a supportive conflict management environment.	3.41	Agreed
6	Finding a mutually beneficial solution is the key to managing disputes between teachers effectively.	3.68	Agreed
Grand Mean		3.48	Agreed

From the Table 2, the respondents agreed to all the question items. They agreed that promoting open dialogue fosters mutual understanding and resolves conflicts. They agreed that team-building activities enhance collaboration and decrease confrontations among teachers. They also agreed that joint problem-solving sessions lead to more lasting solutions to conflicts, encouraging empathy among staff members helps in acknowledging different perspectives, implementing a mentoring system contributes to a supportive conflict management environment and finding a mutually beneficial solution is the key to managing disputes between teachers effectively. Based on the grand mean of 3.48, it could be inferred that the respondents upheld the strategies.

Research Question 3: What are the compromising conflict management strategies that influence the efficient organisation of secondary school teachers in Awka-South Local Government Area, Anambra State?

Table 3: Mean response on compromising conflict management strategies that influence efficient organization of secondary school teachers

S/N	compromising conflict management strategies	$\bar{x}$	Remark
1	Accepting partial solutions is often necessary to manage conflicts effectively.	3.68	Agreed
2	Prioritizing issues helps in reaching a compromise by conceding on less important matters.	3.28	Agreed
3	Establishing a culture of give-and-take among teachers can prevent major confrontations.	3.40	Agreed
4	Teachers gain from being flexible in their positions during conflicts.	3.25	Agreed
5	Bringing in a neutral third party can facilitate compromise between conflicting sides.	3.34	Agreed
6	Teachers' willingness to adjust their positions leads to more effective conflict management.	2.99	Agreed
Grand Mean		3.32	Agreed

Table 3, revealed that the respondents agreed to all the items in the research question three. The result showed that accepting partial solutions, prioritizing issues helps in reaching a

compromise by conceding on less important matters, establishing a culture of give-and-take among teachers, teachers gain from being flexible in their positions during conflicts, bringing in a neutral third party and teachers' willingness to adjust their positions are compromising conflict management strategies that influence the efficient organization of secondary school teachers in Awka-South Local Government Area, Anambra State. The result yielded a grand mean of 3.32, which posits that the underscored strategies are efficient in managing conflict among secondary school teachers in the area.

Discussion of Findings

Competitive conflict management strategies for efficient organization of teachers

The findings showed that the respondents agreed with the competitive conflict management strategies listed in the study, it is evident that these tactics play an integral role in promoting efficient organizational dynamics among secondary school teachers in the Awka-South Local Government Area of Anambra State. The findings showed that the encouragement of assertive communication among teachers significantly enhances problem-solving capabilities. This corroborates with the study of Kasenge and Muleya (2020) who reported that the principle that assertiveness is a critical element in conflict resolution, promotes a constructive dialogue without aggression or passivity, and leads to effective problem-solving. Further, the practice of holding regular debates is identified as a catalyst for fostering a healthy competitive spirit which also translates to improved conflict management among professionals. The collaborative yet competitive nature of debates can stimulate creative thinking and lead to the development of innovative strategies that address the root causes of conflicts within the educational environment (Christensen, Læg Reid, & Røvik, 2020).

Moreover, the setting of explicit performance objectives, as highlighted in the study, is a crucial factor that minimizes ambiguity and, consequently, reduces the propensity for conflict (Smith & O'Donnell, 2023). This approach creates a clear understanding of expectations, which serves to align teachers' goals, thereby minimizing the potential for disagreements (Chen, & Ramirez, 2023). In alignment with research question 1, the implementation of recognition and reward systems for efficacious solutions to conflicts is a powerful motivator. This practice not only incentivizes prompt and effective conflict resolution but also fosters a culture of meritocracy within the school environment (Christensen *et al.*, 2020). Also, the tracking of individual teacher achievements is another competitive strategy that contributes to transparency in conflict management (Kasenge & Muleya, 2020). By maintaining a record of accomplishments, colleagues can appreciate each other's contributions, which can reduce the likelihood of envy-led conflicts and create a more harmonious workplace (Ezeani & Nwabueze, 2019). Lastly, as highlighted in research question 1, the ability to 'win' an argument is perceived as contributing positively to the resolution process. This may indicate that teachers value the sense of accomplishment and recognition that comes from having their ideas and viewpoints validated through constructive disputes (Gomez & Wu, 2023).

Collaborative conflict management strategies for efficient organization of teachers

The findings from this study showed that the respondents agreed with the effectiveness of collaborative conflict management strategies to manage conflicts among secondary school teachers in the Awka-South Local Government Area of Anambra State. Promoting open dialogue as a conflict resolution strategy is crucial in resolving conflicts (Böhm, Rusch, and Baron 2020). By engaging in open dialogue, teachers can articulate their concerns and listen to each other, paving the way for resolution through understanding. This finding is in line with the assertions of the report of Momanyi (2011) who emphasized the importance of open communication in conflict resolution. Similarly, the positive role of team-building activities in enhancing collaboration aligns with the work of Chen & Ramirez (2023), who highlighted the significance of team development stages for effective collaboration. Martinez-Moreno *et al.* (2015) also suggest that team-building can be a preventive strategy, reducing the likelihood of confrontations.

Joint problem-solving is another strategy that was agreed among the participants. The efficacy of this approach is supported by the work of Da-Fonte & Barton-Arwood (2017), who showed that collaboration in problem-solving leads to more comprehensive and lasting solutions due to the integration of diverse perspectives. Fostering empathy has been acknowledged as a critical component in understanding conflicting viewpoints, a finding supported by the study of Fisher *et al.* (1991). Empathy allows individuals to relate to others' emotional experiences, creating a conducive environment for conflict management (Clark, D'Ambrosio & Ghislandi, 2018). Mentoring, noted for its contribution to a supportive environment, is supported by Kram (1985) and has been shown to facilitate not only personal and professional growth but also to enhance conflict management capabilities by providing guidance and support (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004). Also, the pursuit of mutually beneficial solutions as a key conflict management approach reflects the principles of integrative bargaining, which stress the importance of collaborative approaches to dispute resolution. This approach ensures that the interests of all parties are considered and addressed.

Compromising conflict management strategies for efficient organization of teachers

The findings affirmed that secondary school teachers in the Awka-South Local Government Area perceive compromising as a valuable conflict management strategy to achieve efficient organization. All respondents agreed that accepting partial solutions (1), prioritizing issues (2), fostering a culture of give-and-take (3), maintaining flexibility (4), involving a neutral third party (5), and showing willingness to adjust their positions (6) are effective approaches for managing conflicts.

The result of the study is in line with the findings of Smith & Jones (2020), who concluded that teachers who adopt compromising strategies tend to improve their work environment by reducing the potential for escalated disputes. The concept of prioritizing issues and being flexible during conflict management aligns with the view of Taylor, Huang, Jenkins, & Thompson (2019), reaffirming the necessity for a concession on less critical matters to reach

an amicable solution. Furthermore, the agreement on the benefits of a give-and-take culture and the willingness to adjust positions supports the work of Brown (2021), which highlighted that mutual understanding and flexibility are key to effective conflict resolution in educational settings. The mention of using a neutral third party as part of conflict management correlates with the findings from Lee & Nguyen (2022), who emphasized the role of mediation in resolving school conflicts. Remarkably, while our study aligns with these findings, it stands in contrast with the earlier work by Davis (2018), who argued that the compromising strategy might not always lead to positive outcomes, suggesting that such an approach could dilute the authoritative stance of teachers and lead to a loss of control. However, the present study's results contradict Davis's argument, suggesting a contextual difference that may account for the discrepancy.

Conclusion

The study suggests that teachers favour various conflict management strategies for organizational efficiency. Consequently, it concluded that competitive strategies are appreciated for encouraging assertiveness, innovation, and recognition of individual efforts. Collaborative approaches, including open dialogue, team-building, joint problem-solving, empathy, and mentoring, help manage conflicts constructively. Finally, compromising is also seen as effective, with a culture of flexibility and willingness to adjust being the key strategies for peaceful coexistence.

Recommendations: Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Curriculum planners should input the study into the curriculum to equip the students and teachers with the knowledge.
2. School authorities should introduce and encourage reward system to help teachers to embrace dialogue.
3. School authorities should organize structured debates and team-building exercises to promote a competitive yet collaborative spirit among staff. These activities can help to sharpen problem-solving skills, nurture a healthy sense of competition, and mitigate conflicts by fostering better teamwork and understanding.
4. Teachers should be trained to be flexible and willing to compromise. When teachers can prioritize issues and accommodate differing opinions, conflict intensity may deescalate.

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