Relationship between Principals' Emotional Intelligence and their Conflict Resolution Approach in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

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Abstract
The study examined the relationship between principals' emotional intelligence and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The research involved 6,396 teachers from six Education Zones, with 1,200 teachers selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. The Principals' Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (PEIQ) and Principals' Conflict Resolution Approach Questionnaire (PCRAQ) were used to collect data. The instruments were verified for face validity by three experts, and Cronbach Alpha was used to check internal consistency. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer research questions, and linear regression was used to test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 alpha level. The results showed a strong positive relationship between principals' self-awareness, self-management, and conflict resolution approach in Anambra State. However, there was a weak positive relationship between principals' social-awareness and conflict resolution approach. The study recommended continuous professional development for principals to enhance self-awareness, including workshops and training sessions that promote introspection and self-reflection.

Keywords: Principals' Emotional Intelligence, Conflict Resolution Approach

Introduction

Conflict is a natural aspect of human interaction that arises from opposing interests, values, or viewpoints among individuals or groups. In the context of educational settings, conflict can manifest between students, educators, parents, administrators, or other stakeholders, impacting relationships, decision-making processes, and overall school climate. In the opinion of Ihuarulam (2015), conflict is defined as an individual's or group's perception of an incompatibility between their aspirations or values and those of another individual or group within the same organization. In public secondary schools in Anambra State, conflicts may arise due to a myriad of factors, such as academic competition, resource allocation, discipline issues, communication breakdowns, and differing educational philosophies. Anachie and Kulo (2018) buttressed that the hierarchical structure of schools, with principals serving as key authority figures, can also contribute to power dynamics that may fuel conflicts among staff members or between school management and other stakeholders.

Consequently, unresolved conflicts in public secondary schools can have detrimental effects on the overall school climate, leading to increased stress, reduced morale, compromised collaboration, and hindered academic achievement (Johnson and Johnson, 2022). More so, Oshionebo and Ashang (2017) remarked that a positive school climate is essential for achieving the objectives of secondary school education, as it influences students' engagement, motivation, and sense of belonging. Conflicts, if left unaddressed, can erode trust, create negative perceptions of the school environment, and disrupt community cohesion. It is essential for school leaders, including principals, to address conflicts promptly and effectively to maintain a positive learning environment and promote healthy relationships among students, staff, and parents.

Principals therefore play a critical role in promoting a positive learning environment by actively resolving conflicts, modeling respectful communication, and fostering a culture of collaboration and mutual respect among all stakeholders (Anashie and Kulo, 2018). According to Gainey (2015), conflict resolution approach is a necessary tool to reduce adverse consequences of a

crisis situation. Conflict resolution approach proposes strategies and processes for preparing for, preventing, responding to, managing, recovering from, and learning from conflict events. Operationally, conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools involves a range of approaches aimed at addressing and managing conflicts effectively to promote a positive school climate and enhance learning outcomes.

Effective conflict resolution approaches are crucial for fostering a positive school climate, enhancing communication, and promoting collaboration among stakeholders (Johnson and Johnson, 2022). When conflicts are managed efficiently, they can serve as opportunities for growth, learning, and relationship building. Moreover, resolving conflicts promptly can prevent escalation, reduce stress, and enhance overall school performance. There exist several approaches that could be used to resolve conflict in schools. These include: dominance, compromise, synergy, culture of civility, win-lose strategy, lose-lose strategy, win-win strategy, integration, obliging, smoothing, avoidance, mediation and dialogue, separation device, neglect or silence, clarification of inter dependencies, consultation, boxing the problem, clarification of goals, and prayer (Oshionebo and Ashang, 2017). Principals who employ appropriate conflict resolution strategies contribute to a positive school culture and student well-being.

There is no one best conflict resolution approach that may be used in all conflict situations. Different conflict may require different approaches, with the choice of approaches, depending on the nature of the crisis or the parties involved. This is why Hughes, Ginnet and Curphy (2018) reiterated that principals with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to navigate challenging situations, empathize with conflicting parties, and facilitate effective communication. As cited by Goleman (2004), emotional intelligence is a critical leadership trait that influences decision-making, relationship management, and conflict resolution abilities.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is an individual's ability to control impulses, to motivate self, to have empathy for others, and to create positive, social and interpersonal relationships (Dill, 2019). Maulod, Piaw, Alias and Wei (2017) defined EI as the skills to recognize own feelings and feelings of others; the ability to motivate and manage one's emotions and that of others better. Kierstead (2019) looked at the concept of emotional intelligence as an umbrella term that captures a broad collection of individual skills and dispositions. Kierstead described these skills as soft skills or inter and intra-personal skills, that are outside the traditional areas of specific knowledge, general intelligence and technical or professional skills. Personal components and social competence combine to produce four dimensions of Emotional Intelligence. Principals with high emotional intelligence are likely to exhibit greater empathy, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills, enabling them to handle conflicts with poise and sensitivity. By understanding their emotions and those of others, emotionally intelligent principals can defuse tensions, build trust, and promote collaborative problem-solving. Cherry (2019), Jameson (2019) and Olajumoke, Adebowale, Mufutau and Jide (2021) identified these three dimensions as: self-awareness; self-regulation/self-management; and empathy/social awareness.

Self-awareness is the ability to know oneself and understand one's feeling. Self-awareness goes with accurate self-assessment, understanding one's strength and weaknesses and their effects; self-confidence, having faith in self and being willing to put oneself forward. According to Cherry (2019), self-awareness refers to the capacity to recognize and understand emotions and have a sense of how one's actions, moods and the emotions of others take effect. Principals with high self-awareness can recognize their emotional triggers and biases, which helps them remain objective and calm during conflicts (Beqiri, 2018).

Another dimension of emotional intelligence is self-regulation or self- management. This is all about self-control. This is an important part of emotional maturity, controlling one's feelings and/or expressing them in the appropriate circumstances. It simply means waiting for the right time, place and avenue to express one's emotions. It is the ability to be aware of one's emotions and have the flexibility to positively direct one's behaviour in response to those emotions, to manage emotional reactions in all situations and with all people. This is why Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2018) stressed that the ability to manage one's emotions enables principals to handle stressful situations with composure and avoid reactive behaviour that could escalate conflicts.

Empathy or social awareness as another dimension is very critical to EI. It is the ability to understand how others feel. Empathy goes beyond the ability to recognize the emotional states of others. It further involves one's responses to others based on this information. Empathy is also seen as

social awareness- the ability to explain self well and be aware of how one is understood, as well as knowing the extent of comprehension of one's audience (Sani, Ebini and Umar, 2022). Empathy allows principals to understand the perspectives and emotions of others, facilitating effective communication and fostering a supportive environment for conflict resolution (Mayer, et al., 2018).

The importance of emotional intelligence is to produce effective leaders (Beatty, 2017; Zepeda, 2016). According to Goleman (2005), emotional intelligence leads to success, whether at home, school or in the workplace. Goleman elaborated that a principal's ability to understand, identify and empathized with educators' emotions and then react appropriately, are integral factors which could help foster an effective conflict resolution approach when one arises. Beatty and Zepeda stressed that principals who exhibit high level of emotional intelligence will manage their school effectively.

Schools today require leadership that is able to meet vast demands and orchestrate a conducive and peaceful atmosphere for teaching and learning process. Obiekwe and Ogbo (2020) observed that frictions sometimes exist in schools between principals, staff and students; and this has negative impacts on the interpersonal relationships and co-operation among teachers towards achieving set goals of the school. On the other hand, Ekeh and Oladayo (2019) indicated that principals with high emotional intelligence have better leadership success than those with low emotional intelligence. Studies of Ekeh and Oladayo (2019) and Johnson and Johnson (2022) have highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence in shaping principals' decision-making processes, communication strategies, and interpersonal relationships. Moreover, researches of Maulod et al., (2017) and Kierstead (2019) have demonstrated that effective conflict resolution skills play a crucial role in creating a supportive learning environment, enhancing teacher-student relationships, and improving overall school outcomes. Despite these contributions, there remains a gap in the literature concerning the specific impact of principals' emotional intelligence on their conflict resolution approach in the context of public secondary schools in Anambra State.

The motivation behind this study stems from the recognition of the critical role that school principals play in shaping the educational experiences of students and the overall school environment. Principals serve as leaders, mediators, and decision-makers, responsible for fostering a culture of collaboration, respect, and effective communication within the school community. By investigating the relationship between principals' emotional intelligence and their conflict resolution approach, this study seeks to shed light on how these factors intersect and influence the management of conflicts in public secondary schools in Anambra State. It is therefore against this background that the researcher seeks to find out if there is a relationship between principals' emotional intelligence and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

The current situation in public secondary schools in Anambra State deviates significantly from this ideal. Many principals lack adequate emotional intelligence, which hampers their ability to effectively manage and resolve conflicts. This deficiency often results in a reliance on autocratic or avoidance strategies, which can exacerbate conflicts rather than resolve them. The researcher observed that conflicts in these schools are frequent and often poorly managed. Issues such as student indiscipline, teacher grievances, and parental complaints are not uncommon. The inability of principals to handle these conflicts constructively has led to a hostile and fragmented school environment, affecting the morale and performance of both students and staff.

This happens because many at times principals fail to identify varying emotions of themselves and that of their subordinates. There are cases of outbursts of emotions by some principals on teachers; principals saying the right things at the wrong place (in terms of admonition or correction); principals allowing emotions to becloud their judgments; principals being less empathetic and not having clear communication skills. These are strong pointers of low emotional intelligence and this goes a long way to dictate the extent of conflict resolution in the school in case one occurs. By investigating this topic, valuable insights can be gained to enhance educational practices, promote positive school environments, and contribute to overall school improvement in the Anambra State. It is therefore against this backdrop that this study seeks to determine if principals' emotional intelligence relates to their conflict resolution approaches in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

Specifically, the study seeks to determine the relationship between:

1. Principals' self-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State
2. Principals' self-management and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State
3. Principals' social-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between principals' self-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. What is the relationship between principals' self-management and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State?
3. What is the relationship between principals' social-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between principals' self-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State
2. There is no significant relationship between principals' self-management and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State
3. There is no significant relationship between principals' social-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State

Methods

The correlational survey design was used for this study. The population of this study comprised all the 6,396 public secondary school teachers in the six Education Zone in Anambra State. The sample size consisted of 1,200 teachers. Multi-stage sampling technique was used in selection of the sample size. Two instruments titled: Principals' Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (PEIQ) and Principals' Conflict Resolution Approach Questionnaire (PCRAQ) was used to collect data for this study. The face validity of the instruments was determined by three experts. Cronbach Alpha was used to check the internal consistency of the instruments and the reliability values of 0.93 and 0.78 were obtained for PEIQ and PCRAQ respectively. Copies of the questionnaires was administered personally by the researcher using four research assistants who were briefed and guided on the modalities for the administration and collection of the questionnaire. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer the research questions while linear regression was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between principals' self-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 1: Pearson r on principals' self-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools

N	Correlation co-efficient (r)	r^2	Remarks
1050	0.703	0.494	Strong positive relationship

Table 1 shows that there is a strong positive relationship of 0.703 existing between principals' self-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between principals' self-management and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 2: Pearson r on principals' self-management and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools

N	Correlation co-efficient (r)	r^2	Remarks
1050	0.707	0.499	Strong positive relationship

Table 2 shows that there is a strong positive relationship of 0.707 existing between principals' self-management and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between principals' social-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 3: Pearson r on principals' self-management and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools

N	Correlation co-efficient (r)	r^2	Remarks
1050	0.19	0.0361	weak positive relationship

Table 3 shows that there is a weak positive relationship of 0.19 existing between principals' social-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between principals' self-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State

Table 4: Linear regression on the significant relationship between principals' self-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools

				Std. Error		Change Statistics			
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.703[a]	.494	.443	3.93532	.629	9.401	1	1048	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), self-awareness

Table 4 shows the adjusted r^2 value of 44.3% of the variance in principals' conflict resolution approach can be explained by their self-awareness. More so, at 0.05 alpha level, $t(1,1048) = 9.401$, $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between principals' self-management and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State

Table 5: Linear regression on the significant relationship between principals' self-management and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools

				Std. Error		Change Statistics			
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.707[a]	.499	.468	7.60030	.217	2.575	1	1048	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), self-management

Table 5 shows the adjusted r^2 value of 46.8% of the variance in principals' conflict resolution approach can be explained by their self-management. More so, at 0.05 alpha level, $t(1,1048) = 2.575$, $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between principals' social-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State

Table 6: Linear regression on the significant relationship between principals' social awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.19[a]	.036	.0325	8.01072	.217	8.391	1	1048	.016

a. Predictors: (Constant), social awareness

Table 6 shows the adjusted r^2 value of 3.25% of the variance in principals' conflict resolution approach can be explained by their social awareness. More so, at 0.05 alpha level, $t(1,1048) = 8.391$, $p > 0.05$, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The finding in research question one revealed that there is a strong positive relationship between principals' self-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Principals who are self-aware are better able to understand their own emotions, strengths, weaknesses, and triggers. This finding agreed with that of Shah and Singh (2022) that showed a strong positive correlation between emotional intelligence and the compromising, collaborating, and accommodating styles of conflict management. The finding of Lydia (2016) revealed that self-awareness is positively associated with subordinates' use of the collaborative strategy of conflict management. The corresponding hypothesis revealed that there is a significant relationship between principals' self-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This finding supported the finding of Shah and Singh (2022) that there is a significant relationship between self-awareness and conflict management style.

The finding in research question two revealed that there is a strong positive relationship between principals' self-management and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This was in line with the finding of Waweru, Gachunga and Kihoro (2020) that there is a positive correlation between self-management and organizational commitment. This implies that for one unit increase in principals' self-management, teachers' OC increases. Qureshi, Ali, Raza and Whitty (2015) revealed that one of the self-management competencies that is emotional self-control had a considerable impact on employees OC. The corresponding hypothesis revealed that there is a significant relationship between principals' self-management and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This disagreed with the finding of Nwadinigwe and Azuka-Obieke (2016) that there is no significant relationship between self-management as a component of emotional intelligence and academic achievement of senior secondary school students in Lagos State, Nigeria. The difference between both findings could be as a result of geographical change of respondents.

The finding in research question three revealed that there is a weak positive relationship between principals' social-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This finding agreed with the finding of Sani, Ebini and Umar (2022) that teachers disagreed that principals possess the required the level of social-awareness for effective conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State. Conversely, this finding opposed the finding of Adedokun (2017) that there is a strong positive relationship between emotional intelligence and administrative effectiveness of Provosts of Federal Training Centres in Nigeria. The difference between both findings could be as a result of geographical change of respondents.

The corresponding hypothesis revealed that there is no significant relationship between principals' social-awareness and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State. In other words, the social awareness of the principals does not play a significant role in influencing their conflict resolution approach. The findings of the study agreed with Alireza, Hamid, Naghme and Fateme (2013) who conducted that emotional intelligence of social awareness is not associated with conflicts management in Iran High schools. Social-awareness describes how people handle relationships and awareness of others' feelings, needs and concerns. On the other hand, it opposes that of Sani, et al (2022) that there was a significant relationship between principals' level of

social-awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State. The difference between both findings could be as a result of geographical change of respondents.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it was concluded that there is a strong positive and significant relationship between principals' self-awareness, self-management and their conflict resolution approach in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Principals should engage in continuous professional development focused on enhancing self-awareness. Workshops and training sessions that promote introspection and self-reflection can improve their ability to manage conflicts effectively.
2. Principals should implement techniques such as mindfulness, stress management, and emotional regulation strategies to improve self-management skills. These techniques can help principals remain calm and composed during conflicts.
3. Although the relationship between social-awareness and conflict resolution is weak, principals should still work on developing empathy and understanding social cues. Empathy training can help in creating a more supportive and understanding school environment.

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