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PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP STYLES AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EDO STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated principals' leadership styles and conflict management strategies in public secondary schools in Edo State. To guide the study, two research questions and three hypotheses were raised. The study was a descriptive research design adopting the correlational research design. The population of the study was all the 136 principals in the public secondary schools in Edo South Senatorial District. The sample size of the study is 68 principals constituting 50% of the population. The Principals' Leadership Styles Questionnaire (PLSQ) and Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire (CMSQ) were used to collected data. The data was analysed using the Pearson Product Moment Coefficient Statistics and Fisher Z-test. The findings revealed that the predominant principals' leadership style is the charismatic leadership style, while the predominant conflict management strategy is the accommodating conflict management strategy. The study further revealed that there was a significant relationship between leadership styles and conflict management strategies. However, there was no significant difference in the relationship between leadership styles and conflict management strategies based on gender and experience. It was therefore recommended that ministry of Education should create leadership training programmes to educate leaders on the various styles of leadership, expose principals to the different conflict management strategies and gender and experience should be considered in appointing a principal.

Keywords: Principal's leadership styles, Conflict management strategies, Public secondary schools, Edo State

Introduction

The success or failure of any organisation depends on the leader who is accountable for his activities in the organization. It encompasses the full range of managerial responsibilities including planning, organising, staffing, coordinating, reporting, budgeting, decision making, communicating and controlling. Leadership involves the process by which people are influenced to have their efforts directed towards the achievement of some specific goal(s). It can also be defined as the art of influencing the activities of an organised group towards goal setting and goal achievement with a far-reaching implication for organizational effectiveness. The way and manner a leader approaches managing followers is his/her leadership style. It can also be seen as a leader's method of implementing plans and providing directions. Leadership styles are on a continuum, ranging from autocratic, democratic, charismatic and laissez-faire with a variety of other styles in between. Reinke (2009), posits that leaders practice some form of leadership style or combination of styles during their normal work routine with a focus on guiding others towards reaching organizational or personal goals.

Goal attainment is the ultimate focus of organizational management, hence the importance of guiding people in an organization towards this goal irrespective of their personal goals and aspirations. This can be a herculean tasks hence a leader must be imbued with the capacity to manage crises, which is inevitable in organisations with people of divert socio-cultural, religious, ethnic and educational background among others. These people are in constant interaction and inter-relationships which might lead to occasional conflicts. The leadership style adopted to manage these people could influence the management strategy used to mitigate crises when they arise. The major leadership styles include the autocratic, democratic, charismatic and lasses-faire leadership style.

The Autocratic leader doesn't seek the opinion of his subordinates. The leader makes choice based on his/her own beliefs and do not involve others for their suggestions. This style encompasses being arbitrary, controlling, coercive and close minded. It also stresses obedience, loyalty and strict adherence to rules made by the leader thereby making their decisions leader-centered. The Authoritarian leader is equally seen as the sole determinant of what is done, his main

contact with his subordinate occurs when he/she is giving instruction. Bogler (2001), described this style of leadership as one in which the leader tries to exert powerful authority using reward and coercion to influence his/her followers, focusing his/her attention on the product instead of making human needs the centre of attention. Janse (2018), however posited that authoritarian leadership is now an outdated form of management most especially in recent decades as it has created resistance among employees.

The Democratic leadership style on the other hand, which is also known as participative leadership style is more permissive and involves the followers in the decision-making process. A democratic leader also tries to understand problems of their employees and work with them to identify the problem and bring solutions. In other word, he/she mediates for others and provides clear feedback. Though this leadership style has been termed more effective than the authoritative style of leadership, it does have its downside such as when responsibilities are unclear, democratic leadership can lead to communication failure and uncompleted projects. And in some cases the members may not have the necessary knowledge or expertise to make quality contributions to decision making process.

The Charismatic leadership style involves the ability of a leader to use the power of words to influence followers' reality and thought process. Charismatic leaders are admired and respected by their followers and they serve as a strong role model. They have high standard of ethical and moral conduct and provide followers with a vision and sense of mission. Empirical studies have confirmed that the influence of charismatic leadership is positive; according to Krishinan (2000), charismatic leadership is characterized by followers' trust in the correctness of the leaders' belief, unquestioning acceptance of the leader, affection of the leader, and emotional involvement in the mission of the organization. Conger and Kanungo (1998), asserted that charismatic leaders are known for vision, emotional expressiveness, articulation skills, high activity level, self-determination and exemplary behavior. Hence, according to Bligh and Kohles (2016), charismatic leaders are able to galvanize support from followers.

The Laissez-faire style emphasizes employees' freedom; that is, groups or individuals in the organization are given the freehand to make decision or act without participation from the leader. This could

sometimes be a good alternative as it allows conflict to be resolved by parties involved.

School principals may use any of these leadership styles based on the context and situation at hand, especially in a conflict situation. Conflict is an inevitable part of life and occurs naturally during our daily activities. There will always be differences in our opinions or disagreement between individuals and or groups. It is a basic part of the human experience and can influence our actions or decisions in one way or the other. Most social organisations like educational establishments are complex organizations with people of diverse cultural background, needs, goals, skills, values, knowledge, religion among others (Tambari and Asime, 2017). Conflict can be a good thing and avoiding it to preserve a false impression of harmony can cause even more damage (Loehr, 2017). There are different levels of conflicts that may exist; intrapersonal, intergroup, and intragroup conflict (Loehr, 2017; Fisher, 2000; Evans, 2013). Conflict is one issue every school principal is expected to handle successfully because it is a natural phenomenon in an organization as a result of interactions that exists amongst people or individuals in the organization.

Regardless of the level of conflict that takes place, there are several strategies that can be employed to help manage them. Conflict management can be perceived as the process of reducing negative outcomes of conflict while increasing the positive. Hence, school leaders are expected to be able to manage conflict when it occurs and their ability to manage them is important to the success of the institution. Therefore, the effectiveness of a leader could be based on the leadership style and the management strategy applied in conflict situation. Conflict management involves implementing strategies in which disputes are resolved, negative results minimised and positive results prioritized. Thus, the school principal may choose to adopt any of the following strategies to manage conflict: accommodating, collaborating, avoidance and compromising strategies as elucidated by Kamalakkannan (2010).

Accommodating strategy involves putting the other party's needs before one's own and is the best choice to resolve a small conflict and move on with more important issues. This strategy is often used when you either give in or are persuaded to give in. This is a situation where the principal chooses to ignore the offences of the teachers by not

giving them written query instead they are being warned verbally. Accommodating also means when someone is cooperative, but not assertive. This is one of the qualities of a Charismatic leader who is loved by his followers.

Collaborating strategy is characterized by high assertiveness and high cooperativeness. Leaders with this strategy view conflicts as problems to be solved in order to achieve their personal goal and that of the other person. It is important when issues at stake are too important to be compromised. The strategy considers the needs and wants of each party and a win-win solution is found so that everyone leaves satisfied. This style is marked with low assertiveness and high cooperation. This kind of leaders want to be accepted and liked by other people, thus avoiding conflict in favour of harmony.

Avoiding strategy is one which aims to reduce conflict by ignoring it, postponing, removing the conflicted parties or evading it in some manner. It is characterized by low assertiveness and cooperativeness. Here, to avoid conflict, leaders give up their personal goals and relationship believing that it is easier to withdraw physically and psychologically from a conflict rather than face it. It is appropriate for issues of low importance to reduce tension or when disruption will be costly.

Compromising strategy is characterized by moderate assertiveness and moderate cooperativeness. It aims at finding a solution that is mutually acceptable and expedient and partially satisfies both parties involved. Here, conflict is seen as a situation where all parties involved gain something by ensuring a middle course between two extremes and parties leave satisfied.

A competent school principal must be able to identify the conflict management strategy which is appropriate for each case and most suitable for each situation. These strategies are similar, hence there is tendency for a principal to actually use more than one and should not be rigid in the choice of the one to use, instead, he should be guided by the prevailing situation. It is argued and supported by literature that leadership styles or behaviours remain stable overtime and are expected to be significantly related to conflict management styles (Hendel, Fish and Galon, 2005).

Okon (2008), also discovered that principals' background characteristics which include gender and work experience relate to

effective administration and in extension affect conflict management. The manner in which the principal build commitment is affected by gender and conflict management style and can be a determinant of organizational effectiveness or lead to disintegration (Rahim, 1992). Similarly, Umoren (2001), asserted that the principals' gender is a determinant factor in choice of conflict management strategies; that females tend to avoid conflict because conflict takes time and pain to resolve while males use more of dominating and accommodating conflict management strategies. Also, it is commonly believed that experience, might play important roles in leadership style and conflict management strategies. Principals' years of experience has been widely acknowledged by some studies as a significant factor affecting the extent of their administrative effectiveness (Ibiam, 2005, Mukinya, 2013).

Chaindolia and Anastasiou (2020), in their study found that though school leaders exhibited a range of conflict management styles with frequent use of compromise and collaborative styles, avoidance was less frequently used. They also found that Laissez-faire leadership style was rarely used. They concluded from their study that leadership and conflict management style can be associated with the effectiveness of conflict management.

This paper therefore sought to investigate the relationship between Principal's leadership style and conflict management strategy in Edo State public secondary schools.

Research questions
1. What is the predominant leadership style of principals' in Edo State public secondary schools?
2. What is the predominant conflict management strategy of principals' in Edo State public secondary schools?

Hypotheses
1. There is no difference in the relationship between principals' leadership style and conflict management strategy in Edo State public secondary schools.
2. There is no significant difference in the relationship between principals' leadership style and conflict management strategy in Edo State public secondary school based on gender.

3. There will be no significant difference in relationship between principals' leadership styles and conflict management strategies in Edo State public secondary schools based on experience.

Methodology

This study is a descriptive research design adopting the correlational research design. The population of the study consisted of all the 136 principals in the 7 public senior secondary schools in Edo South Senatorial district. The sample size of the study is 68 principals, constituting 50% of the population. Three teachers per school, constituting 204 teachers, were purposively selected to provide data for the study. The multi stage sampling technique was adopted to select the sample for the study. First, the three Senatorial districts in Edo South were identified from which one was randomly picked. Next, the names of the Local Government Areas in the district were listed followed by the number of schools in each Local Government Area. This was followed by using 50% to select the schools and principals in each Local Government Area using the simple random sampling technique and finally purposively selecting teachers in each of the sampled schools at 3 teachers per school.

Two instruments were used in the study. The first is 'Principals' Leadership Styles Questionnaire' (PLSQ) and the second is 'Conflict Management Questionnaire' (CMQ). The reliability of the instrument was determined using the internal consistency method by employing the Cronbach Alpha Formula. The obtained coefficient reliability is 0.79 and 0.85 which indicated that the instruments are reliable and fit for use. The data collected was analysed using mean, standard deviation Pearson Product Moment Coefficient and Fisher z- test. The decision rule for research question 1 and 2 was based on the criterion mean of 2.5. Therefore any calculated mean (x) equal or greater than 2.50 will be regarded as high, while any calculated mean (x) lesser than 2.50 will be regarded as low.

Result

Research question one: What is the predominant leadership style used by principals in Edo State public secondary schools?

Table 1: The predominant leadership styles of principals in Edo State public secondary schools

S/N	LEADERSHIP STYLES OF PRINCIPALS	N	MEAN	STD. DEV.	DECISION
	Democratic Leadership Style				
1	Consulting teachers before taking decision on school matters	60	2.62	.992	High
2	Listening to teachers' view on any issue	60	2.96	.838	High
3	Appreciating teachers' initiative in school affairs	60	1.95	.867	Low
4	Engaging teachers in the process of conflict management	60	2.82	.934	High
	Autocratic Leadership Style				
5	Imposing his opinion on teachers	60	2.18	.934	Low
6	Holding old regular meetings to discuss school affairs	60	2.19	.926	Low
7	Taking complete control in crises situation	60	2.85	.960	High
8	Trust other's opinion in matter of conflict	60	2.25	.962	Low
	Laissez-faire leadership style				
9	Avoiding conflict when it occurs	60	2.27	.949	Low
10	Showing concern when there is conflict	60	1.96	.932	Low
11	Being in complete control in conflict situation	60	3.01	.918	High
12	Playing a vital role when matters become critical	60	3.16	.873	High
	Charismatic Leadership Style				
13	Showing exemplary behavior in handling school affairs	60	2.81	.790	High
14	Earning respect of subordinates	60	3.09	.824	High
15	Exhibiting effective communication skills	60	3.19	.753	High
16	Showing fair disposition in resolving conflict in school	60	3.18	.756	High
	Grand mean	60	2.65		

The data in table 1 showed the democratic leadership with three items higher than the criterion means of 2.5, the autocratic leadership style with one item more than the criterion mean, the laisse-faire leadership style with two items more than the criterion mean and the charismatic leadership style with all four items more than the criterion mean. Therefore, the predominant leadership style of principal in Edo State public secondary school is the charismatic style of leadership with four items which was more than the criterion mean value of 2.5

Research question two: what is the predominant conflict management strategy of principals' in Edo State public secondary schools?

Table 2: The predominant conflict management strategies of principals' in Edo State public secondary schools

Criterion Mean = 2.50

S/N	PRINCIPALS' CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES	N	MEAN	STD. DEV.	DECISION
	Avoiding				
1	Postponing issues when they arise	60	3.55	.534	High
2	Remaining neutral in school affairs	60	2.08	1.094	Low
3	Responding to situations swiftly	60	3.53	.747	High
4	Ignoring minor issues	60	1.75	.728	Low
	Accommodating				
5	Issuing verbal warnings for minor offences	60	3.10	.877	High
6	Accepting differences in ideas of all warring parties	60	3.48	.624	High
7	Considering all situation to ensure a peaceful resolution of conflict	60	3.00	1.025	High
8	Cooperating with everyone involved in a conflict situation	60	3.23	.647	High
	Collaborating				
9	Collaborating with all in school affairs	60	3.35	.755	High
10	Identifying problems with my team	60	3.53	.596	High
11	Opening to others' idea in school matter	60	1.95	.928	Low
12	Sharing outcome when matters arises	60	3.27	.548	High
	Dominating				
13	Defending my opinion at all cost in school affairs	60	2.43	.871	Low
14	Ensuring that my decisions on issues are final	60	2.22	.922	Low
15	Willingness to make adjustment when decisions are made	60	1.82	.813	Low
16	Satisfying everyone when issues occur	60	2.50	.948	High
	Compromising				
17	Making sacrifices to ensure that issues are resolved	60	3.45	.622	High
18	Making compromises in resolving issues	60	2.00	.939	Low
19	Acknowledging the views of subordinates when matter arises	60	1.57	.698	Low
20	Negotiation is always my watch word when matter arises	60	3.18	.624	High
	Grand mean	60	2.75		

Table 2 indicates that Avoiding conflict management strategy had 2 items higher than the criterion mean, the Accommodating strategy had all 4 items higher than the criterion mean value, the Collaborating strategy had 3 items higher than the criterion mean value, the Dominating conflict has 1 item higher than the criterion mean and the Compromising strategy had two items higher than the stated criterion mean of 2.5. Therefore, the predominant conflict management strategy used by principals in Edo State public secondary school is the Accommodating conflict management strategy.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between principals' leadership style and conflict management strategy in Edo State public secondary schools.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis of Principal Leadership Styles and Conflict Management Strategies

Variable	N	r	Sig	(2 tailed)
Principals leadership styles				
	60	0.070	0.594	
Conflict management strategies				

Table 3 shows the r-Value of 0.070 with a p-value of 0.594 tested at an alpha level of 0.05 level of significance. The p-value is greater than the alpha level of significance (p>0.5) and as such the null hypothesis is retained. Therefore, there is no relationship between principals' leadership style and their conflict management strategies.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the relationship between principals' leadership style and conflict management strategies in Edo State public secondary schools based on gender.

Table 4: Fishers 2-test analysis of principal leadership styles and conflict management strategies by gender

Variable (Sex)	N	r	2r	Zcal	z-value
Male	25	0.412	.4356		
				1.06	1.96
Female	35	-0.137	.1409		

Table 4 shows the fishers Z statistics of principals' leadership style and conflict management strategies by gender. The coefficient values of male and female principals are 0.412 and -0.137 respectively, testing at an alpha level of 0.05, the calculated z of 1.06 is less than the critical value of 1.96, the null hypothesis is thus rejected. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the relationship between principals' leadership style and conflict management strategies in Edo State public secondary school based on gender.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significance difference in the relationship between principals' leadership style and conflict management strategies in Edo State public secondary schools based on principals' experience.

Table 5: Fishers Z-Test analysis of principals' leadership styles and conflict management strategies by years of experience

Variable	N	R	Zr	Zcal	z-value
Less than 5 years	13	-0.059	.0601		
				-0.09	1.96
5 years and above	47	0.092	.0902		

The data in table 5 shows that the coefficient values of principals' with less than 5 years experience and principals with 5 years and above are -0.059 and 0.902 respectively. Testing at an alpha level of 0.05, the calculated z-value of -0.09 is less than the critical value of 1.96. Thus the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the relationship between principals' leadership style and conflict management strategies based on principals' years of experience.

Discussion of Findings
The findings of the study revealed that the predominant leadership style employed by secondary school principals in Edo South Senatorial District is the charismatic leadership style. This finding is in line with that of Bligh and Kohles, (2014) who revealed that charismatic leaders usually arises in times of crises when the basic values, institutions and legitimacy of the organization are brought into question. Leaders function more effectively in a peaceful environment, hence will adopt

the leadership style that will enable them galvanize support from their followers as posited by Kohles, (2014).

From the findings in this study, it was revealed that the predominant conflict management strategy used by principals in Edo state public secondary schools is the accommodating strategy. This strategy justifies the charismatic leadership style which was found to be the predominant leadership style employed by secondary school principals in Edo South Senatorial District in this study. It also aligns with Kamalakkannan (2010)'s position on the accommodation strategy style that seeks to ensure the support of subordinates towards goal achievement by focusing on appeasing people and maintaining harmonious relationship at all cost.

The findings of the study also revealed that there is no significant relationship between principals' leadership style and their conflict management strategy. This finding supports Hendel, Fish and Galon, (2005) who argued that leadership styles or behaviours remain stable overtime and are expected to be significantly related to conflict management styles. This seems logical because the employee/relations orientation of a leader has a positive or negative correlation with conflicts.

Findings from the study revealed that there is a significant difference in the relationship between principals' leadership style and conflict management strategies by gender. This finding is in tandem with Umoren (2001), who asserted that the principals' gender is a determinant factor in choice of conflict management strategies. Findings in the study also shows that there is a significant difference in the relationship between principals' leadership style and conflict management strategies based on principals' years of experience. This finding aligns with Ibiam (2005) and Mukinya (2013) who found that, principals with longer teaching experience perform better than their colleagues with less experience, when it comes to resolving conflicts within the school. The findings on gender and experience also support Okon (2008) who discovered that principals' background characteristics which include gender and work experience relate to effective administration and in extension affect conflict management.

Conclusion

It was concluded that the predominant leadership style in Edo State public secondary schools is the charismatic style while the predominant conflict management strategy is the accommodating strategy. The findings of the study also revealed that there is no significant relationship between principals' leadership style and their conflict management strategy though there was a significant difference in the relationship based on principal's gender and work experience. The study revealed that leadership style in school administration has its consequences and it is associated with conflict management strategies in the school system as principals exhibit the leadership style that will enable them earn the support of their followers. Similarly, the predominant use of the accommodating strategy is an indication that principals enlist cooperation of subordinates and considers the situation of an issue to ensure a peaceful resolution of conflict. The principals' leadership style and conflict management strategy differs based on their gender and years of working experience.

Recommendations

i. Ministry of Education, with the support of the appropriate agency, should create leadership training programmes to educate leaders on the various styles of leadership as there might be need to use different leadership style that suites the situation

ii. Principals' should be exposed to the different conflict management strategies by the Ministry of Education. this will enable them resolve conflicts using the appropriate strategy.

iii. Since demographic variables such as gender and experience are important factors in the management of conflict and one's leadership style, they should be considered when appointing teachers to the position of principal.

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