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EXPLORATION OF COUNSELLING-CONFLICT RESOLUTION AS A CATALYST FOR PEACE IN SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Relying on secondary data and theoretical method this Paper explored the link between counselling and conflict resolution as a means of fostering peaceful co-existence in schools in Nigeria. The paper used a qualitative design, using secondary data as review. Evidences abound of cases of conflicts in primary, secondary and tertiary schools in Nigeria. Unresolved conflict breeds disharmony and rancour among students and staff. It could heighten the prevalence of cases of bullying, cultism and destruction of lives and properties in our schools. Conflicts persist often because parties involved do not usually see the need to end the dispute or refused to do so for personal pride. In this case, counselling can play a pivotal role in conflict resolution by addressing and resolving disputes between individuals or groups in constructive manner in schools. Studies reviewed revealed various forms of resolution strategies used to manage conflicts in many Nigerian schools. Suggestions include: deployment of trained counsellors to schools; training and retraining workshops for counsellors on conflict resolution were put forward.

Keywords: Counselling, Conflict resolution, Peace, and Schools

Introduction

Peace is one of the cardinal factors that can bring about substantial progress in educational endeavours in our schools. Unfortunately, often peace is ripped off in schools by conflict. Conflict is a pervasive occurrence in every human society as it manifests itself in different dimensions all over the world (Aina & Obi, 2022). Evidences abound of cases of conflicts in primary, secondary and tertiary schools in Nigeria. Conflict in schools may arise from cultural and societal differences (Karl, 2016), especially in a country like Nigeria that is multicultural, multi-religious and multiethnic. Schools consist of people with diverse cultural, religious, social, political and economic background; these social factors reflect on their attitude and temperament and can lead

to conflicts (Arop et al., 2018; Owan & Agunwa, 2019). Unresolved conflict can breed disharmony and rancour among students and staff. It could heighten the prevalence of cases of bullying, cultism and destruction of lives and properties in schools. Conflict produces incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social levels (Rahim, 2007). It could lead to stress anxiety, loneliness, decrease in motivation, and unwillingness to come to

school (Ertürk, 2022). Abdullahi and Halima (2018) also posited that conflict could result in retardation of development, social dislocation, and destruction of lives and properties, thereby making the school environment unfriendly for teaching and learning to take place. Thus, conflict can result in cessation of normal functioning in schools and can be reason for escalating the cases of bullying, cultism and other hate and harmful behaviours in our schools today.

However, to promote peace and unity in Nigerian school there is a need for appropriate counselling approaches to foster successful conflict resolution outcomes. Thus, counselling is a vehicle that can convey conflict resolution to its successful destination where peaceful coexistence can be found. Counselling as a human centric service is a process that can help individuals to adaptively deal with emotional, psychological, or personal challenges. Through counselling, conflict can be resolved and parties involved can regain adaptive relationship. It is worthy of note that National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004, 2013) made it clear that Counselling services should be rendered in schools in Nigeria to foster school adjustment among learners. Conflicts persist often because parties involved do not usually see the need to end the dispute or refused to do so for personal pride. In this case, counselling can play a facilitator role in conflict resolution by addressing and resolving disputes between individuals or groups in a constructive manner. In a school system, learners need counselling services for proper school adjustment which could help them to navigate through conflicts associated with learning environment. Similarly, teachers and management staff also need counselling when there is crisis in a school in order to restore peace. Thus, counselling intervention in resolving conflict in schools is for the good of everyone and the growth of schools.

Conceptual Issues

Conflict

Conflict as an interactive process involves disagreement, discrepancy or incompatibility between two or more individuals or groups on issues; and it is an inevitable part of human relationship (Elgoibar et al. (2017). The term ‘conflict’ has its origin in the Latin word ‘conflictus’, meaning to ‘strike together’, ‘fight’, ‘struggle’ or ‘battle.’ Thus, conflict refers to disagreements and disputes among parties in schools. It could be disagreement between students and school management or between teachers and the school management and so on. It is a process or state of hostility, antagonism between individuals or groups. Conflict can manifest when an individual’s action interferes with the goals, needs, or beliefs of another person. In a school, problem may arise from communication since people’s emotions, personal characteristics

and desires may be different, leading to the emergence of conflict in schools (Ertürk, 2019). Moreover, conflict situations can lead to inefficiency and dysfunctional consequences in social contexts (Owan, 2018). Unmanaged conflict can lead to negative feelings and situations like rivalry in group targets, uncooperative attitude and instability among group members.

Conflicts in schools have been attributed to many factors by scholars such as: incessant

students' violent protests (Ekundayo & Ajayi, 2009); economic realities and corruption (Robinson & Nwosu, 2014); and autocratic or authoritarian style of leadership (Akpaprep et. al, 2019). However, conflict can be constructive or destructive too (Charles, 2013), especially when it is properly resolved and lead to a higher-level productivity among parties

There are many types of conflicts which according to Shahmohammadi (2014), include:

- ◆ **Interpersonal conflict** refers to a conflict between two individuals. This occurs typically due to how people are different from one another.
- ◆ **Intrapersonal conflict** occurs within an individual. The experience takes place in the person's mind. Hence, it is a type of conflict that is psychological involving the individual's thoughts, values, principles and emotions.
- ◆ **Intra-group conflict** is a type of conflict that happens among individuals within a team. The incompatibilities and misunderstandings among these individuals lead to an intra-group conflict
- ◆ **Inter-group conflict** takes place when a misunderstanding arises among different teams within an organization. In addition, competition also contributes for intergroup conflict to arise.

Causes of Conflict in schools

The following are some causes of conflicts in schools:

- ◆ **Poor communication network:** Poor communication network one of the main causes of conflict in schools. When school heads introduce policy with carrying teachers and students there can conflict
- ◆ **Overlapping authority:** When two or more teachers or departments claim authority for the same activities or tasks, conflict is likely to occur.
- ◆ **Limited resources:** Most school resources are limited, leading to survival of the fittest which could breed conflict.
- ◆ **Task inter-dependence:** When the task of a department in a school is dependent upon the output of another department, conflict may arise
- ◆ **Incompetent management:** Incompetent management that fails to properly perform their responsibility will lose the confidence of their subordinates.
- ◆ **Impatience:** Some students are impatient with school management and would want to carry out protests

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is the process of bringing to an end an existing disagreement or dispute between two or more people. Alu (2002) defines conflict resolution as the use of various methods like dialogue, arbitration, third party and sanction to bring about peace among organizations and between individuals. According to Abdullahi and Halima (2018), counselling approach in conflict

resolution is a strategy to prevent and manage violence in schools so that students can learn and teachers can perform their duties in a positive, healthy and safe environment for educational advancement. Johnson and Johnson (2014) observed five techniques for resolving intrapersonal conflicts: withdrawal, smoothing, forcing, compromise, and collaboration. Withdrawal method which is denying the existence of a conflict does not resolve conflict but may builds it, but may be effective for unimportant cases. Smoothing is a method that plays down differences and emphasises surface harmony resulting in a win-lose situation, but could be ineffective when there is reluctance to deal with intrapersonal conflict. Forcing as an approach to conflict resolution can result in win-lose situation and can be destructive when losers have no way to express self, and can result in future disruptions. Compromise is a conflict resolution approach where each party gives up something in order to meet midway to resolve the conflict, but can be ineffective if the solution the conflict is doubted by parties involved. Collaboration approach gives room to each party's position and resolution can result in win-win for all, but collaboration approach requires a lot of time to be effective.

Counselling

The concept of counselling has attracted different definitions from scholars based on their ideological perception of counselling. According to APA (n.d.), counselling psychology involves the use of “a broad range of culturally-informed and culturally-sensitive practices to help people improve their well-being, prevent and alleviate distress and maladjustment, resolve crises, and increase their ability to function better in their lives.” ACA (2020) viewed counselling as “a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals.” In addition, Mallum (1990, pg. 14) perceived counselling as “an interpersonal relationship, usually between two individuals, a Counsellor and a Client, in which the principal objectives are the development of the client, the improvement of his welfare and the amelioration of his problems.” Furthermore, Akinade et al. (2005) saw guidance and counselling as an applied psychology, designed to assist people in making choices and decisions. For Egbochukwu (2008) counselling is a process by which a troubled individual could be assisted to feel free and behave in a more personally satisfying manner through interactions with a counsellor who could stimulate him or her to develop appropriate adaptation in his/her environmental contexts. In addition, Abdullahi (2018) perceived counselling as a process which could be developmental or intervening, dealing with individuals' wellness, personal growth, career, and pathological concerns. Counselling processes can enhance

he psychological well-being of learners (Okoro & Odoemelam 2012). Considering the definitions offered by experts in the field of counselling, it suffices to say that counselling can play a pivotal role in the enhancement of conflict resolution, since scholars in the field all see counselling as a helping process to enhance adjustment on the part of the client.

Counselling as a tool for conflict resolution in schools in Nigeria

Conflict is a part of human existence as already established in this paper. Conflict resolution provides a route for ending conflict that could lead to deterioration of human relations and negative consequences in social contexts. The school is a place for teaching and learning processes. Hence, the need to resolve conflicts should be handled with kid's glove. Thus, this section of the paper examines counselling approaches that can aid resolutions of conflicts as revealed in literature reviewed. Findings of studies revealed that counselling is effective in conflict resolution among young adults (Reddy et al., 2018); can create an atmosphere of peace (Johnson & Thompson, 2020); can be adopted by principals to address conflicts among teachers (Smith 2018); and can foster mental health support in educational settings (Garcia & Thompson (2017). In addition, scholars like Brown and Kim (2019) have suggested that principals' implementation of counselling and support strategies enhanced a resilient and thriving teaching community, while Lawal (2017) and Nezera (2017) posited that the use of counselling interventions can be an effective strategy for managing conflict in secondary schools. Amusala, (2023) also showed evidence of counselling effectiveness in raising and maintaining university students' self-esteem in Kenya.

At this point, it is necessary to explore some empirical works on counselling and conflict resolutions closely.

Aina and Obi (2022) in a study examined students-management conflicts in public tertiary institutions in Osun State, Nigeria between 2010 and 2020. The researchers adopted the questionnaire and in-depth interview approaches to collect data from respondents. Three public tertiary institutions were selected for this study and a total number of 400 questionnaires were retrieved from respondents while interviews were conducted with 15 key informants. The study revealed that 87% of respondents indicated that school authorities often made use of force in handling conflicts and 86% of the respondents also reported that using force as a conflict resolution strategy was ineffective. The researchers recommended adoption of peace education that can equip both students and school authorities with the necessary skills to prevent or manage conflicts constructively to create a conducive and peaceful learning environment in the tertiary institutions where the study was conducted. From the recommendation of the study, we can deduce the importance of counselling in conflict resolution as part of the peace education suggested by the researchers. The respondents made it clear that forcing resolution strategy was ineffective, giving room for one to suggest that counselling approach could be a better means of resolving conflicts in schools, since counselling is generally non-coercive but supportive, informative and enlightening to help parties to see the need sheath their swords peacefully.

In another development, Nduka-Ozo (2016) investigated the counselling implications of conflict and conflict resolution in secondary schools in Ebonyi State. The population for the study consisted of all the principals of public Secondary Schools numbering one hundred and forty-seven (147), and the entire population was used. The study assessed the extent to which school

principals adopted dialogue, arbitration, third party and sanction in conflict resolution in their schools. The findings of the study revealed that principals, both male and female used sanction more than dialogue, arbitration and third party in resolving conflict in their schools. The researchers recommended dialogue, arbitration and third-party methods for conflict resolution in the schools, instead of relying on sanction as the only option. From the study we can deduce that most of the schools were ineffective in conflict resolutions because the principals relied mainly on sanction or force. Counselling strategies would generally align with dialogue to resolve conflicts because it gives parties involved in conflicts the opportunities to express themselves and give room for negotiations that can lead to peaceful resolutions. However, sanction or force strategy that was adopted mainly by the principals who participated in the study is an indication that the principals could be autocratic in their approaches to conflict resolution which may lead to unsuccessful conflict resolution. Students who suffer from coercive conflict resolution approach may resort to clandestine revenge mission like cultism to unleash their anger on school environments. This may lead to wanton killings and destruction of properties.

Egbo, Afam and Onukwube (2022) in a study determined the counselling strategies that are adopted by secondary school principals for conflict management in secondary schools in Enugu State, adopting a descriptive survey design with three research questions and three hypotheses which guided the study. The population for the study consisted of all the 295 public secondary school principals in Enugu State; and the 295 public secondary school principals were used as sample for the study since it was not a large population. The researchers reported that the study revealed that Enugu State secondary schools' principals' adoption of counselling strategies for conflict management was low to an extent. The researchers viewed counselling strategies in the study through the lens of Nezera (2017) strategies: Allow the Client to Explore (ACE Strategy), which allows the client to explore; Silences in the Relationship (USR Strategy) where a counsellor provides unconditional support, empathy and warmth; and Paraphrasing Strategy which helps the counsellor to clarify the client's expressions. The researchers reported that principals in secondary schools in Enugu did not follow these strategies, leading to abysmal conflict resolution outcomes in the state. They recommended ACE as a strategy for conflict management because it enhances the client's level of motivation to change. They also recommended USR strategy because it permits both the counsellor and the client to get closer, and share feelings, thoughts, and emotions. The researchers also recommended Paraphrasing Strategy because it encourages the client to open up in terms of additional thoughts, new expressions, and more understanding of both the immediate and remote causes of the conflict.

From the study, one can deduce that most of the schools' conflict resolutions have been

unsuccessful in Nigeria because non-counselling approaches are often adopted by school management. This could be the reason for the escalating crises in schools and youthful unrest, especially in our campuses.

Maxwell and Deo (2024) also investigated principals' conflict management strategies for

teachers' effective service delivery in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Four research questions and four null hypotheses were used for the study. A Descriptive Survey Research Design was used for the study. The population of the study comprised 6,893 teachers in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. A sample of 1,379 teachers representing 20% of the 286 public senior secondary schools in Rivers State was used for the study. Stratified random sampling technique was used for the study. The findings of the study showed that communication, negotiation, collaboration and counselling and support services as the principals' conflict management strategies to enhance teachers effective service delivery in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. One can conclude from the findings of the study that communication, negotiation, collaboration being part counselling of processes made effective conflict resolution possible in the study.

Conclusions

This paper has examined counselling-conflict resolution nexus with focus on Nigerian schools. Counselling and successful conflict resolutions are inseparable, making the link or the nexus between the two processes worthy of scholarship investigation. Studies reviewed in this paper points to the fact that counselling is the catalyst for conflict resolution. Findings from the studies reviewed show that most conflict resolution strategies in many Nigerian schools were ineffective, an indication that counselling strategies have to be infused into conflict resolution approaches of schools to produce the right outcome.

Recommendations

- ◆ In view of the importance of counselling in conflict resolutions the following recommendations can be useful in addressing the challenges of ineffective conflict resolution in schools in Nigeria.
- ◆ Trained counsellors should be posted to all the schools in Nigeria because they are trained to use dialogue to resolve conflicts, which is more likely to be effective than sanction and forcing.
- ◆ There should be training and retraining workshops for counsellors on conflict resolution.
- ◆ Heads of schools should recognize the roles of counsellors in conflict resolution and allow them to feature prominently in school conflict resolutions processes.
- ◆ Workshops or seminars should be organized to train students and heads of schools on conflict resolution strategies.
- ◆ School authorities should employ counselling strategies in conflict resolution instead of relying mainly on sanction.

- ◆ Counsellors should enlighten parents about school rules and regulations and encourage them to respect conflict resolution processes of their wards' schools.
- ◆ Counsellors should have interactive sessions with students to caution them against antisocial behaviour that can breed conflicts in schools.

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**EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND SEXUAL SATISFACTION AS
CORRELATES OF MARITAL STABILITY AMONG MARRIED ADULTS
IN OGUN STATE, NIGERIA**