

ASSESSMENT OF COUNSELLING STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN OWERRI EDUCATIONAL ZONE

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Abstract

The study investigated Counselling Strategies for Conflict Resolution in Public Secondary Schools in Owerri Educational Zone. Based on the purpose of the study three research questions guided the study. The study adopted descriptive research design. The population of the study comprised all the three thousand six hundred and thirteen (3,613) secondary school teachers in the sixty-five (65) government owned secondary schools in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State. The sample was made up of 300 teachers. This is made up of 100 teachers from girls' school, 100 teachers from boys' school and 100 teachers from co-educational schools. Simple random sampling (balloting without replacement) was used. The instruments used for data collection was titled School Counselling Strategies for Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (SCSCRQ). The SCSCRQ was validated experts. The reliability co-efficient(r) of 0.88 was obtained using Cronbach alpha method. Data collected were analyzed using Mean, standard deviation for the research questions. The result showed that there are effective Counselling Strategies for Conflict Resolution in Public Secondary Schools despite its causes and consequences in Owerri Educational Zone. It was recommended that teachers and School counsellors should provide and monitor the under reporting of hate, crime and discriminating behaviours in schools.

Keywords: Assessment, Counselling Strategies and Conflict Resolution

Introduction

The role of education in bringing about human development cannot be over-emphasized. This is because education is a tool with which people, using the human ability to respond to, and interact with the environment, pass on from generation to generation those aspects of their culture and values which they consider to be worthwhile. Education embraces all processes by which a person acquires knowledge and skills to live well in his society. It remains an

undisputable fact that no society or nation can rise above its educational level. Uchendu (2013), defined education as a social process designed to induct the rising generation into the membership of their society.

In Nigeria, the education sector is divided into Basic Education, secondary education, and tertiary education. Secondary education is the education children receive after Basic Education and before the tertiary stage. Secondary education spans from Upper Basic Education (Junior secondary to senior secondary school). The broad goals of secondary education are to prepare the child for useful living within society and for higher education. Consequently, the objectives of secondary education are; to provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology, and commerce at sub-professional grades; foster national unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity; raise a generation of people who can think for themselves; respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labor; appreciate those values specified under broad national goals; and live as good citizens and provides technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development, (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

Summarily, the place of secondary education in national development cannot be overemphasized. Mostly because education in general and secondary education, in particular, fosters the worth and development of the recipients for each recipient's sake and for the general development of society. The success of secondary education should, therefore, be of concern to all and sundry. Lawal (2017) posited that one of the challenges of secondary education in Nigeria is to manage effectively all conflicts arising in the system.

Conflict is a serious disagreement or argument, typically a protracted one. In an attempt to further clarify what conflict is all about, Nezera (2017) described it as synonymous to clash, incompatibility, inconsistency, incongruous, opposition, be at variance, vary, odds, diverge, differ, disagree, contrast, collide, contradictory, contrary, opposing, antithetical, discrepant, contrasting divergent, impugn-ant and disagreeing.

Conflicts in effect involve a struggle or quarrel usually between individuals or groups in the process of competing for a reward. It could, therefore, be regarded as a form of disagreement in an establishment between two individuals or groups who have cause to interact formally or informally. Karl, (2016) perceive that conflict may arise from cultural and societal differences in schools. 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. Viraponge in Joy and Amaka (2015) defined conflict in school as disagreement, dispute or clash of interests between individuals or groups within the school community, including students, teachers, administrators and parents. 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. Conflict arises from differences between two people or a group. It occurs as a result of disagreed value, beliefs, motivation, ideas or desires.

In public secondary schools, conflicts may arise due to a myriad of factors, such as academic competition, resource allocation, discipline issues, communication breakdowns. Conflict in secondary schools especially in Nigeria has become a major concern to all stakeholders in education. Students' unrest, revolts and violence are regular features of our secondary schools today. Conflict in secondary schools hinders productivity, lower morale and stimulates inappropriate behaviours among students (Namara, 2007). According to Umaru & Halima (2018) there are different types of conflicts in organizational settings as follows;

Intrapersonal Conflict: These occur within a person and that one can experience, with respect to the number of resources one has by hearing internal voices that disagree. To buttress this assertion Orlich and Callhan (2001) explained in this type that individual tries to reconcile conflict within his/her own value structure. Similarly, Hart(2002)observed that it may not only take a toll on one's physical body but it often occupies one's thoughts and causes a great deal of emotion.

Interpersonal Conflict: This type of conflict occurs between two or more people (Meck, Heit, & Page, 2005). It is also referring to clashes that involves two or more individuals, who perceive each other as being in opposition to preferred outcomes (goals) and or attitudes, values or behaviours. While Nelson-Jones (2019) sees it as a situation in which one or both individuals in a relationship are experiencing difficulty in working or living with each other. This type of conflict usually occurs due to differences or incompatibilities, needs, goals or styles clashes.

Intra group Conflict: This emerges between people who identify themselves as belonging to the same group. It is a clash among some or all of groups members, which often affects the group progress and effectiveness. In a school situation an intergroup conflict occurs within members of a class, where students sit in close proximity and interact with each other.

Intergroup Conflict: This emerges between two or more group of people. It is highly intense and costly to the group involved (Witmet & Hackerin Umaru & Halima, 2018). This occurs between two or more schools. According to Anteliffer (2020), it happens within organization at three levels. These are vertical, horizontal and line staff conflicts. Vertical Conflict is clashes between levels in an organization. This occurs when superiors try to control subordinates too tightly as subordinates resist the control for instance class captain or group captain in the classroom/school.

Horizontal conflict: is clashes between groups of employers at the same hierarchical level in an organization. In a school situation horizontal conflict will occur, if one department desires a longer proportion of scarce resources at the expenses of another department.

Line-staff conflict: is a clash over authority relationships. As Jennings and Wattan in Umaru and

Halima (2018) expressed it occurs from different organizational roles of line and staff.

Conflict in secondary schools can arise from various factors. Also, there are different events that lead to conflicts in secondary schools. The situation or circumstance in which people find themselves, the personality of the individuals, the urge or desire for power, and the resources may lead to different types of conflicts to exist in secondary schools in Nigeria. Some of the causes are; lack of proper preparation by teachers, lack of good mastery of subject matter, students' disruptive behaviour, competition, bullying and harassment, cultural and social differences, inadequate school materials, poor parental attitude, Lack of respects, poor teacher-students' relationship. And poor parent- teacher relationship.

Conflicts in schools can have severe consequences for students, teachers and overall learning environment. Here are some potential consequences: Retardation of school development, social dislocation, decreased academic performance, increased absenteeism, decreased motivation, increased stress and anxiety, decreased self-esteem, Difficulty forming relationships, increased aggression, decreased respect for authority, increased discipline problems, decreased school climate, increased teacher turnover And Decreased community Engagement. School conflict brings about violence, which often leads to destruction of lives and properties because of the use of deadly weapons making school not friendly for learning to take place. Generally secondary school conflicts lead to human suffering, disruption of normal activities such as educational development, positive human progress and restriction of freedom, thereby making school difficult. By understanding these consequences, schools and educators can make take proactive steps to prevent and manage conflicts, creating a more positive and supportive learning environments. Conflict in schools need to be prevented and managed for students' progress in education. This should be done through conflict resolution.

Conflict resolutions are important to schools and classroom teachers for effective and efficient teaching and learning to take place (Mayanchi, 2014). Conflict resolution is the process of resolving disputes or conflicts between two students or groups. It involves finding a mutually acceptable solution that meets the needs and interests of all parties involved. By prioritizing conflict resolution in secondary schools, educators can create a supportive, inclusive and productive learning environments that benefits students, teachers and the broader community. Conflicts resolution is crucial in secondary schools. Therefore, there is need for conflict resolutions through Counselling strategies in our secondary schools to produce conducive learning atmosphere.

Counselling in the school system cannot be overemphasized. Counselling services have always played a leading role in terms of student's development and improvement. According to Modo; Sanni; Uwah and Mogbo (2013) counselling promotes the effectiveness of the educational system for goals attainment and guiding learners through the learning process. Okobiah and Okorodudu (2006) highlighted that Counselling is encompassed by activities of relevant services and also processes of helping students within and outside the school, to achieve

their full potentialities in their emotional, moral, social, academic and vocational developments. Furthermore, Nwachuku (2019) summarizes the definition of counselling as a systematic and organized educational helping services, professionally given by a professionally trained counsellor or therapists to a learner of any age, within or outside the school walls at appropriate level. The essence is to assist him understand himself, situation and environment, discover his interests, potentialities and opportunities in life and learn how best to effectively utilize his assets as well as minimize his weaknesses, to live a maximum productive life. Orhungur (2009) defines counselling as it involves some person or persons called “counsellors” being hired by another person or persons called “clients”, to help the clients solve some sort of personal or social problems. Gysters (2016) views counselling as an in-depth interaction between two or few individuals with the intent of assisting the client to better understand himself in relationship to his or her present and further problems. The interaction that takes place between the client and the counsellor is so intense and of high quality that the end product is a change in behaviour due to the learning process that had taken place during interaction. Gysters (2016) further explained that “counselling deals with effective realm, which involves feelings, emotions, attitudes and not simple ideas.

According to Aloa (2019), counselling is a helping relationship between the counsellor and the client. The functions of the counsellor in the helping relationship are to provide the facilitative and action conditions necessary for change in the client’s mode of thinking, feeling and behaviour. UNESCO (2000), defined counselling as a learning-oriented process which usually occurs in the literature relationship with the aim of helping the person learn to put such understanding to effective use for self and society. However, with proper counselling support, students experiencing difficulties in learning can build their self-efficacy they need to succeed in their life (Owuor, Gori & Kimani, 2017).

There are different Counselling strategies for conflict resolution in secondary schools. Strategies according to Smith (2016), refer to techniques, approaches, methods, and interventions adopted to solve problems. King (2016), added that a strategy is a plan of action intended to accomplish a specific goal. Research evidences such as King (2016), Lawal (2017), and Nezera (2017) have recommended counseling strategies for managing conflict in secondary schools. In specific term, Nezera (2017), recommended three counseling strategies that could be used to manage conflicts in secondary schools effectively. They are, Allow the Client to Explore (ACE Strategy), Using Silences in the Relationship (USR Strategy), and Paraphrasing Strategy. Nezera (2017) explained the strategies as follows; the Allow the Client to Explore (ACE Strategy) allows the client to explore his or her hidden world and new aspects in his or her behaviour, recognizing social and mental experiences. This can occur during the treatment process as well as the development of insight. The aim to facilitate clients to progress in the exploration process has been greatly based on the concept that through connecting with vital healthy cores and by changing feelings, thought and behaviour in an individual way, the client can progress in the healing process and to fulfil his or her human potential.

In Using Silences in the Relationship (USR Strategy), the counselor provides unconditional support, which has been regarded as one aspect of an intimate relationship. Silences have been considered as non-verbal reactions that express different meanings such as empathy and understanding, confusion and misunderstanding. Using silences in the relationship allows both the counsellor and the client to get closer, to share feelings and thoughts, or in a different way, to be aware of distances and gaps that may occur in the process.

Paraphrasing Strategy is an influential reaction that contributes greatly to the process' progress. This reaction encourages additional thoughts and new expressions and aids the client in examining conflicts. Using paraphrasing during counseling also assists the counselor to clarify and brighten the client's expressions.

Some other Counselling strategies:

1. Group Therapy Counselling geared towards helping students understand and appreciate good and healthy human relationship should be adapted to the secondary school teachers and students.
2. Counselling services should organize interaction sessions with parents to enlighten the parents on the school rules and regulation, conducts and programmes. So as to cooperate with the teachers and school authorities for smooth running of the school activities and ensure conflict free atmosphere in secondary schools.
3. Counsellors should organize seminar/workshop for students on what constitutes violence and its consequences. A catch them young approach to prevention of the menace of conflict should be embraced by extending enlightenment programmes to the secondary school students through Counselling interaction.
4. Orientation services to create awareness for adjustment in the school environment. So that they do and do not of the school and activities should be explain and discuss with the students. The school offences and punishment will be highlighted to the students.
5. Active listening: Active listening is a powerful communication technique that involves fully concentration on and comprehending the message being conveyed by the other person. it requires the listener to be fully present and engaged in the conversation, avoiding distractions and mental preparation of their response.
6. Communication Skills: It refers to the ability to convey information, ideas, thoughts, and feelings effectively and efficiently through various forms of communication, such as verbal, non-verbal, written and visual.
7. Empathy and Validation: Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. It involves putting oneself in someone else's shoe and imagining how they feel. Empathy is not the same as sympathy, which is feeling sorry for someone without fully understanding their emotions while validation is the process of acknowledging and accepting another person's emotions, thoughts and experiences as valid

8. Information services keeps guidance and Counselling services alive in the school system because it involves making available to the student's information needed to take educational, vocational, personal and social decision, which will enhance students' development and progress in the school should be provided by student's counsellors.

Researchers like Umaru and Halima (2015), counselling strategies for conflict resolution in schools: a tool for education and development in Nigeria beyond 2020. The study prescribed that counsellors should provide strategies for conflict resolution through multidisciplinary approach and techniques for educational development.

Kilag, et al. (2024) examines administrators' conflict management strategies, highlighting their significance in organizational dynamics. Studies delve into the role of administrators in addressing conflicts among staff, stakeholders, and within organizational structures. Research explores various conflict management approaches employed by administrators, including mediation, negotiation, and collaboration, and assesses their effectiveness in resolving disputes and promoting organizational harmony. Additionally, studies investigate the impact of administrators' leadership styles, communication skills, and emotional intelligence on conflict resolution outcomes.

Effective conflict management by administrators fosters a positive work environment, enhances productivity, and cultivates trust and respect among organizational members. Understanding administrators' conflict management strategies is crucial for promoting organizational effectiveness and employee well-being.

Therefore, this study assessed counseling strategies for conflict resolution in public secondary Schools in Imo State

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to assess counselling strategies for conflict resolution in secondary schools in Imo State. specifically, it sought to:

- i. find out the causes of conflicts in public secondary schools in Owerri Educational Zone.
- ii. find out the consequences of conflicts in secondary schools in Owerri Educational Zone
- iii. find out counselling strategies for conflict resolution in secondary schools in Owerri Educational Zone

Research Questions

1. What are the causes of conflicts in secondary schools in Owerri Educational Zone.
2. What are the consequences of conflicts in secondary schools in Owerri Educational Zone.
3. What are the counselling strategies for conflict resolutions in secondary schools in Owerri Educational Zone

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is descriptive survey research design. This is because the design involves eliciting responses on the opinions of the participants. According to Nworgu (2023), this type of research design involves a well-detailed critical examination of a situation to find what it is and how it is. This makes the research design suitable for the study. The population of the study comprised all the three thousand six hundred and thirteen (3,613) secondary school teachers in the sixty-five (65) government owned secondary schools in Owerri Education Zone 1 of Imo State. Out of these schools, seven (7) were Girl's schools, five (5) were Boy's and fifty-three (53) were co-educational schools. The sample was made up of 300 teachers drawn from six-five (65) secondary schools in the study area. This is made up of 100 teachers from girls' school, 100 teachers from boys' school and 100 teachers from co-educational schools. Simple random sampling (balloting without replacement) was used to select 5 local government areas in Owerri Education Zone 1. Also, stratified random sampling was used to select school type from each of the selected Local Governments Area (boys', girls' and co-educational schools). Researchers structured Questionnaire entitled School Counselling Strategies for Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (SCSCRQ) was used for data collection. The instrument had two sections, namely, A and B. Section A contained the bio-data of the participants, while, section B is made up of the objectives of the study. The SCSCRQ was validated by two experts in measurement and evaluation and one expert in Educational Guidance and Counselling department from Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education respectively. The Instrument was estimated for pilot testing using Cronbach Alpha method. The reliability co-efficient of 0.88 was obtained. Arising from the high co-efficient level, the instrument was considered reliable for use in the study. Descriptive statistics such as mean was obtained to the answer research questions.

Research Question One: What are the causes of conflicts in public secondary schools in Owerri Educational Zone.

Table 1: *Mean and Standard deviation on causes of conflicts in public secondary schools.*

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Lack of proper preparation by teachers.	3.00	1.0	Accepted
2	Lack of good mastery of subject matter.	3.01	1.3	Accepted
3	Students' disruptive behaviour.	2.96	0.9	Accepted
4	Inadequate school materials.	3.00	1.0	Accepted
5	Poor parental attitude.	3.23	1.7	Accepted
6	Lack of respects.	3.02	1.3	Accepted
7	Poor teacher- students' relationship.	3.05	1.3	Accepted
8	Poor parent- teacher relationship.	3.00	1.0	Accepted
9	Bulling and harassment	2.96	0.9	Accepted
10	Cultural and socio-economic differences	3.00	1.0	Accepted

Result in Table 1 shows that all items scored above 2.50. This implies that Lack of proper preparation by teachers, Lack of good mastery of subject matter, Students' disruptive behaviour, Inadequate school materials, Poor parental attitude, Lack of respects, Poor teacher- students' relationship, Poor parent- teacher relationship, Bulling and harassment and Cultural and socio-economic differences are the causes of conflicts in public secondary schools in Owerri Educational Zone.

Research Question Two: What are the consequences of conflicts in Public Secondary schools in Owerri Educational Zone.

Table 2: *Mean and Standard Deviation on consequences of conflicts in public Secondary schools*

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
11	Retardation of Development	3.00	1.1	Accepted
12	Social Dislocation	3.10	1.2	Accepted
13	Destruction:	3.20	1.4	Accepted
14	Decreased academic performance	2.90	1.0	Accepted
15	Increased absenteeism	3.00	1.1	Accepted
16	Dropout rate	3.10	1.2	Accepted
17	School property damage	3.00	1.0	Accepted
18	Increase injuries and violence	3.23	1.7	Accepted
19	Decreased morale	3.02	1.3	Accepted

Result in Table 2 indicated that all the items scored above 2.50. This implies that retardation of development, Social Dislocation, destruction, decreased academic performance, increased absenteeism, dropout rate, school property damage, increase injuries and violence and decreased morale are the consequences of conflicts in public secondary schools in Owerri Educational Zone.

Research Question Three: To find out counselling strategies for conflict resolution in secondary schools in Owerri Educational Zone.

Table 3: *Mean and standard deviation on counselling strategies for conflict resolution in secondary schools*

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
20	Group Therapy Counselling	3.0	1.1	Accepted
21	Counsellors should organize seminar/workshop	3.1	1.2	Accepted
22	Orientation services to create awareness for adjustment in the school environment.	3.2	1.4	Accepted
23	Information services	3.2	1.4	Accepted
24	Active listening	3.0	1.1	Accepted
25	Empathy and validation	3.1	1.2	Accepted
26	Problem-solving	3.1	1.2	Accepted
27	Communication skills	3.0	1.1	Accepted

Result in Table 3 indicated that all the items scored above 2.50. This implies that Group therapy counselling counsellors should organize seminar/workshop, Orientation services to create awareness for adjustment in the school environment. Information services, Active listening, Empathy and validation, Problem-solving and Communication skills are the counselling strategies for conflict resolution in secondary schools.

Discussion of Findings

Causes of conflicts in public secondary schools in Owerri Educational Zone.

Results indicated that Lack of proper preparation by teachers, Lack of good mastery of subject matter, Students' disruptive behaviour, Inadequate school materials, Poor parental attitude, Lack of respects, Poor teacher- students' relationship, Poor parent- teacher relationship, Bulling and harassment and Cultural and socio-economic differences are the causes of conflicts in public secondary schools in Owerri Educational Zone. This result is in line with the findings of Namara (2007), Umaru and Halima (2015) Conflict in secondary schools hinders productivity, lower morale and stimulates inappropriate behaviours among students.

Consequences of conflicts in Public Secondary schools in Owerri Educational Zone.

Results showed that retardation of development, Social Dislocation, destruction. decreased academic performance, increased absenteeism, dropout rate, school property damage, increase injuries and violence and Decreased morale are the consequences of conflicts in public secondary schools in Owerri Educational Zone. This result is in accord with the finding of Gerard (2013) negative consequences influenced the educational system.

Counselling strategies for conflict resolution in secondary schools in Owerri Educational Zone.

Result indicated that Group therapy counselling counsellors should organize seminar/workshop, Orientation services to create awareness for adjustment in the school environment. Information services, Active listening, Empathy and validation, Problem-solving and Communication skills are the counselling strategies for conflict resolution in secondary schools. The finding is in line with King (2016), Lawal (2017) and Nezera (2017) have recommended counseling strategies for managing conflict in secondary schools. In specific term, Nezera (2017), recommended three counseling strategies that could be used to manage conflicts in secondary schools effectively. They are, Allow the Client to Explore (ACE Strategy), Using Silences in the Relationship (USR Strategy), and Paraphrasing Strategy. Nezera (2017), explained the strategies as follows; the Allow the Client to Explore (ACE Strategy) allows the client to explore his or her hidden world and new aspects in his or her behaviour, recognizing social and mental experiences. This can occur during the treatment process as well as the development of insight. The aim to facilitate clients to progress in the exploration process has been greatly based on the concept that through connecting with vital healthy cores and by changing feelings, thought and behaviour in an individual way, the client can progress in the healing process and to fulfill his or her human potential. In Using Silences in the Relationship (USR Strategy), the counsellor provides unconditional support, which has been regarded as one aspect of an intimate relationship. Silences have been considered as non-verbal reactions that express different meanings such as empathy and understanding, confusion and misunderstanding. Using silences in the relationship allows both the counselor and the client to get closer, to share feelings and thoughts, or in a different way, to be aware of distances and gaps that may occur in the process. Paraphrasing Strategy is an influential reaction that contributes greatly to the process' progress. This reaction encourages additional thoughts and new expressions and aids the client in examining conflicts. Using paraphrasing during counselling also assists the counsellor to clarify and brighten the client's expressions.

Conclusion

The study concluded that there are effective Counselling Strategies for Conflict Resolution in Public Secondary Schools despite its causes and consequences in Owerri Educational Zone.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made;

1. School counsellors should provide and monitor the under reporting of hate, crime and discriminating behaviours.
2. School counsellors should establish a formal social contract for desirable behaviours to students,
3. School authority and counsellors should regularly organize interactive forum for parents, students and teachers to enable them gain adequate information and encourage healthy well-being in the school.

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