



Relationship between Emotional Intelligence of Principals and Conflict Management in Secondary Schools in Niger State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence of principals and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State, Nigeria. The study adopted the correlational survey research design. The population of the study consisted of 3895 staff. The sample size of the study constituted 520 respondents. Two instruments were used for data collection. Pearson's product moment correlation was used for data analysis. The findings of the study showed that there was a low positive significant relationship between principals' self-awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State and there was a low positive significant relationship between principals' social awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State. The study recommended that the Niger State Ministry of Education should organise regular training for principals to boost the self-awareness component of their emotional intelligence to

help them become effective conflict managers of their various secondary schools in the state.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Self-awareness, Social Awareness, Conflict and Management

Introduction

The complex and diverse nature of people makes conflict an inevitable phenomenon in the school system. Human complexity and diversity are inherent in differences in beliefs, ideology, feelings, thoughts, attitudes, characters, culture and environmental factors. The nature of conflicts that occur in the process of managing secondary schools in Niger State varies from one school to another. In the school system, conflicts may occur among students, between students and teachers, and between teachers and the school authority among others. Conflict arises out of interactions among members of a given school. The frequent occurrence of conflicts in secondary schools in the Niger State of Nigeria may prevent effective teaching and learning needed to achieve educational goals which therefore demands that conflict is

expected to be properly managed (Rotimi, 2020).

When conflicts are not properly managed, they may degenerate into dangerous situations by creating tension that would reduce teachers' morale in performing their teaching responsibilities thereby preventing effective teaching and learning. Teachers and students could be happy and remain stable emotionally to contribute to the success of a school when there is no tension and excessive conflicts in the school system or if the conflict that arises is well managed by the principal (Adedokun, 2015). Conflict management is the practice of recognising and dealing with grievances and disputes in a rational, balanced and proactive manner. Effective management of conflicts in secondary schools, therefore, requires the principals to have good knowledge of their emotional intelligence (Iyala et al., 2021). Proper management of conflict in the school system requires

a principal with a high level of emotional intelligence since the issues that usually induce conflicts are related to feelings, moods, and emotions. The principals' emotional stability may increase their power to manage difficult situations that normally cause conflicts in secondary schools. In the view of Nkechi and Felix (2018), emotional intelligence is the capacity to perceive emotions, assimilate emotionally related feelings, understand the information of those emotions and manage them effectively. Emotional intelligence not only facilitates better thinking but also helps an individual to be aware of one's feelings and emotions (Goleman, 2015). In the context of this study, emotional intelligence requires the principals to be aware of their personal feelings and that of others to enhance a cordial relationship with staff and students (Adeniyi & Omoteso, 2016). Emotions contain information and influence thinking, as a result, principals are required to incorporate emotions intelligently into their reasoning, problem-solving, judging and relationship with staff and students to reduce tension and impulses that influence the frequent occurrence of conflicts in the secondary school system. Principals are expected to understand their own emotions, and the emotions of staff and students as well as possess the skills to manage relationships successfully. The ability to manage feelings and handle stress is an aspect of emotional intelligence that is very important for determining the effectiveness of every principal in a secondary school (Tjan, 2012).

Salovey and Mayer (1990) grouped emotional intelligence into five components as follows: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, empathy and relationship management. The various dimensions of emotional intelligence are useful for the effective management of conflicts in the school system. Self-awareness is key to realising one's strengths and weaknesses. Principals with self-awareness skills are aware of their abilities and limitations, seek feedback and learn from their mistakes, and know where they need to improve and when to work with others who have complementary strengths (Muindi, 2016). Self-awareness could help emotionally intelligent principals to make appropriate decisions needed for effective conflict management in the school setting and determine their roles in the decision-making process. Through self-awareness, principals could be guided to identify their emotional ability and use it to make decisions that are devoid of the frequent occurrence of conflict but rather

promote peaceful working relationships among staff in the school setting. Self-awareness could help a principal to be fair towards his or her approach, actions and reactions daily. Principals with such qualities are great motivators and good managers of difficult situations around them (Goleman, 2015).

Social awareness could also help principals to understand the feelings of teachers and students and their reactions towards a particular issue. Social awareness is the ability to read the emotional state of a group of people. Insight into group social hierarchies requires social awareness on an institutional level, not just an interpersonal one. It helps the principals to be equipped to make decisions that would be devoid of conflict and promote peace in the school environment. Social awareness is the ability to accurately identify the emotions of other people and thus understand the effects of those emotions, that is, to understand what other people are thinking and feeling even if the perceiver does not feel the same way (Alireza et al., 2017). Principals with good acknowledgement of their social awareness could perceive situations, interpret nonverbal cues such as tone of voice or facial expression and use the outcome to encourage their subordinates towards effective job performance. The understanding of other people's feelings and concerns flows from awareness of one's feelings. This sensitivity to others is critical for higher job performance whenever the focus is on interactions with people (Iyala, 2018).

In Niger State, it seems much emphasis is not placed on the appointment of principals using emotional intelligence as one of the criteria as the intelligence quotient test is usually given the highest priority. As a result, principals may find it difficult to integrate emotional intelligence successfully into conflict management of their various secondary schools, and such a situation would not promote a peaceful school atmosphere. Every secondary school in Niger State consists of students, staff and other management staff who are expected to cooperate to facilitate the attainment of secondary school goals. Every staff is expected to work toward effective teaching and learning. Both staff and students interact among themselves to ensure that they undertake their respective responsibilities successfully. In secondary schools in Niger State, conflicts normally arise as students fight among themselves, students fight with teachers,

teachers disagree among themselves, and management staff may take decisions that could be opposed by the staff among others (Nwafor, 2013).

The above frequent occurrence of conflicts in secondary schools in Niger State is a worrisome situation as principals in the state are not novices but experienced teachers who are promoted to occupy the position of principal must have worked in the school system for several years. In this regard, it seems that every principal has adequate knowledge of instructional delivery, and understands local, state, and federal guidelines, policies, and laws respectively that guide school management among others. One, therefore, wonders why conflicts frequently occur among staff and school authorities in secondary schools in Niger State! The researchers speculated that principals seem to be managers with good knowledge of school rules and regulations but fail to understand how to accommodate the feelings and moods of both students and staff to reduce the level of incessant conflicts in the secondary school system. As such, this study was structured to survey the relationship between the emotional intelligence of principals and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Secondary schools in Niger State seem to be faced with a series of conflicting issues like tension especially during a rampage by students when they feel that they have been exploited by teachers and school management respectively. Many principals seem not to have definite approaches to managing certain conflicting issues in their schools as some of them apply some personal ideas and initiatives which may favour some parties who are involved in a given conflict against the others. This may be responsible for the incessant complaints by some teachers that principals are partial and authoritarian. The prevalence of conflicts normally creates tension, misunderstanding, confusion, and unfriendly relationship among staff that could prevent teachers from undertaking their teaching job effectively.

Most secondary schools in Niger State witness strife, disagreement, discord of action, antagonism, segregation, protest and confusion which demonstrate the

presence of conflicts in the school system. The above conflict-related issues may be connected to the level of principals' emotional intelligence. The conflict issues have prompted many stakeholders of secondary schools such as the parents, community leaders, and teachers to ask several questions such as: Do principals employ any approach in managing conflicts? Do principals employ emotional intelligence components to manage conflicts? Or could it be that the principals are ignorant of their emotional intelligence and the appropriate component to adopt in minimising their school conflicts? The thrust of this study was to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence of principals and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence of principals and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State, Nigeria. The following were the specific objectives of the study:

1. To determine the relationship between principals' self-awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State.
2. To examine the correlation between principals' social awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between principals' self-awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State?
2. What is the correlation between principals' social awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State?

Hypotheses

The study was guided by the following hypotheses:

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between principals' self-awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State.

HO₂: There is no significant correlation between principals' social awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State.

Methodology

The study was guided by the correlational survey research design. The population of the study consisted of 295 principals and 3600 teachers. The total population of the study, therefore, consisted of 3895 subjects obtained from 295 secondary schools in Niger State. The researcher used Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table of specifications to select the sample size of 520 respondents. The study used two instruments. The instruments include "The Principals' Emotional Intelligence Test" and "Questionnaire on Conflict Management of Secondary School". The Principals' Emotional Intelligence Test consisted of 25 items. The test was adapted from the Emotional Competence Inventory designed by Goleman in 2000 using the emotional competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, empathy and relationship management). The instrument was designed based on a 4-point rating scale given as follows: R = Regularly (4), QO = Quite Often (3), RA = Rarely (2) and S = Sometime (1).

The instrument yielded validity indices of 0.70 and 0.76 for principals' emotional intelligence test and questionnaire for conflict management respectively. Cronbach's Alpha was employed to compute the reliability coefficient which produced 0.81 for the emotional intelligence test and 0.78 for the questionnaire on conflict management. The emotional intelligence test instruments were administered to the principals who constituted the sample of the study, while the questionnaires on conflict management were administered to the sampled teachers. Total copies of 520 instruments were administered to the respondents, however, 11 questionnaires were rendered invalid by the respondents, as such, the remaining valid 509 questionnaires were used for data analysis of this study.

The calculated values of Pearson's product moment correlation statistic (r) was used to answer the research questions. In the course of interpreting the results of the research questions, any calculated correlation of r below 0.50 was considered weak while the ones above it were considered strong. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using Pearson's product moment correlation.

Results

The calculated values of Pearson's product moment correlation statistics (r) was used to answer the research questions and the results are presented in Tables 1 and 2 below:

Research question 1: What is the relationship between principals' self-awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State?

Table 1: Relationship between Self-Awareness and Conflict Management

Variables	N	R	Remarks
Self-awareness	509	0.040	Weak positive relationship
Conflict management	509		

Table 1 above indicated the relationship between principals' self-awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State. An overview of the table shows that at the sample size of 509, the calculated value of Pearson's product moment correlation (r) is given as 0.040 which is below the benchmark of 0.50. Hence, there is a weak positive relationship between principals' self-awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State.

Research question 2: How is the correlation between principals' social awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State?

Table 2: Relationship between Social Awareness and Conflict Management

Variables	N	R	Remarks
Social awareness	509	0.052	Strong positive relationship
Conflict management	509		

Table 2 above revealed the relationship between principals' social awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State. An overview of the table shows that at the sample size of 509, the calculated value of Pearson's product moment correlation (r) is given as 0.052 which is above the benchmark of 0.50. Hence, there is a strong positive relationship between principals' social awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State.

Hypotheses Testing

All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using Pearson's product moment correlation and the results are presented in Tables 3 and 4 below:

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between principals' self-awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State.

Table 3: Correlation Coefficient Analysis Showing the Significant Relationship between Principals' Self-Awareness and Conflict Management in Secondary Schools in Niger State

Group	R	p-value	Sig. Level	Remarks
Self-Awareness				
Conflict Management	0.516	0.000	0.05	H ₀₁ not accepted

Table 3 indicates the coefficient of the significant relationship between principals' self-awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State. The analysis of the results revealed that the p-value is 0.000 while the R-value is 0.516. Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than the significant level of 0.05, hypothesis one (H₀₁) was not accepted. The result, therefore, implies that there was a low positive significant relationship between principal self-awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant correlation between principals' social awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State.

Table 4: Correlation Coefficient Analysis Showing the Significant Relationship between Principals' Social awareness and Conflict Management in Secondary Schools in Niger State

Group	R	p-value	Sig. Level	Remarks
Principal Social awareness				
Conflict Management	0.601	0.002	0.05	H ₀ 2 not accepted

Table 4 showed the coefficient of the significant relationship between principals' social awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State. The analysis of the results revealed that the p-value is 0.002 while the R-value is 0.601. Since the p-value of 0.002 is less than the significant level of 0.05, hypothesis two (H₀2) was not accepted. The result, therefore, implies that there was a low positive significant relationship between principal social awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State.

Findings of the Study

The following were the major findings of the study:

1. There was a low positive significant relationship between principals' self-awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State.
2. There was a low positive significant relationship between principals' social awareness and conflict management of secondary schools in Niger State.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of hypothesis one indicated that there was a low positive significant relationship between principals' self-awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State. The finding of this study agreed with that of Omini (2015), who conducted a study on demographic and emotional correlates of principals' performance in conflict management of secondary schools in South-South Nigeria, and concluded that there is a

significant relationship between self-awareness of principals and their conflict management skills. The similarity in the findings of this study and that of Omini (2015) gave credit and reliability to the relationship that exists between the self-awareness of principals and conflict management. This signifies that principals' self-awareness is bound to help them to be aware of their feelings and emotions as well as that of the teachers and students. Such understanding determines how they react to a series of conflict-related issues in school management. The integration of the emotional intelligence component of self-awareness into school management is indispensable as it enables principals to take into consideration the feelings and moods of teachers, thereby promoting peaceful co-existence among members of a given school. Self-awareness is key to realising one's strengths and weaknesses. Principals with the self-assessment component of emotional intelligence seek feedback and learn from their mistakes and they know where they need to improve and when to work with others to enhance a stable school system devoid of conflicts.

The findings of the study further showed that there was a low positive significant relationship between principals' social awareness and conflict management in secondary schools in Niger State. The findings of the study agreed with Adeyemi (2019) who ascertained that emotional intelligence of self-awareness and social awareness influence conflict management in public secondary schools in Ondo State. The understanding of other people's feelings and concerns depends on how one understands the social lives of the people. This sensitivity to others is critical for minimising conflicts and promoting peace since the principals are obliged to interact with staff and students in the management of the school system. Principals with social awareness see situations differently, sense others' feelings from different perspectives, take interest in their concerns and manage conflicts effectively. Conflict can be managed effectively in the secondary system when principals know about the social feelings of staff and students through the utilisation of an effective communication system. Principals with a high level of social awareness perceive situations, interpret nonverbal cues such as the tone of voice or facial

expression of teachers and use the outcome to make decisions that would reduce the occurrence of conflicts in the secondary school system.

Conclusion

The study concluded that self-awareness helps principals in secondary schools in Niger State to understand their feelings and emotions as well as the feelings of the teachers and students, and their reactions towards issues, thereby improving their conflict management skills in the school system. Principals with social awareness view situations differently and sense others' feelings from different perspectives which helps them to successfully manage conflicts in the secondary school setting.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. The Niger State Ministry of Education should organise regular training for principals through workshops, seminars and conferences to boost the level of their self-awareness component of emotional intelligence to help them become effective conflict managers of the various secondary schools in the state.
2. The Niger State Teaching Service Commission should include an emotional intelligence test as part of the criteria for promotion of teachers to the position of principals as this may help to ensure that only teachers with a good level of social awareness component of emotional intelligence are appointed as principals to ensure conflicts are easily managed in the secondary school system.

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