

# **ADOPTION AND UTILIZATION OF EFFECTIVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING PEACE-CULTURE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to investigate Principal's adoption and utilization of effective conflict management strategies for promoting peace-culture in secondary schools in Anambra State. The study adopted descriptive survey design. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance were formulated for the study. The population of the study consisted of 254 principals and 254 vice principals (Administration) in the public secondary schools of Anambra State. Data were collected using a 22-item questionnaire. The questionnaire was validated by three experts. For the reliability of the instrument, a coefficient value of 0.86 was obtained and was considered satisfactory for the study. Mean and standard deviation were used in answering the research questions. The t-test was adopted in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that principals did not adopt a considerable number of effective conflict management strategies in schools. Also, the extent to which they utilized effective conflict management strategies in building peace-culture was low. It was thus recommended among others, the principals as a matter of urgency should be exposed to the necessity of adopting all the effective conflict management strategies. This should be done through conferences and seminars if the aim of building peace in secondary schools would be achieved.

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**Keywords:** Conflict, Management, Strategies, Peace-culture

## **Introduction**

Peace is central to human existence, especially now that almost all the nations of the world are facing tremendous challenges in maintaining peaceful coexistence among the citizenry. In Nigeria today, an overwhelming incident of violence, mayhem, insurgences, cultism, terrorism, and unwanted destructions of lives and property among youths exists. This worrisome situation calls for an urgent need for the youths/students to be helped early enough on various ways of cherishing high moral standards by avoiding attitudes and actions capable of destroying them and their future. It therefore becomes obvious why the various global declarations on peace by the United Nations emphasized that the key ingredients in building a culture of peace lies on education (Ebirim, Mbaji & Iwuozor, 2013). Sustainable education especially at the secondary school level promotes the acquisition of useful knowledge, skills, attitudes, and the values required to bring about behavioural changes. However, this will enable both students and teachers to minimize conflict and violence. It also empowers school administrators with the knowledge to successfully explore effective strategies for managing conflict and work in harmony with one another to create conducive environment for teaching and learning.

Culture requires that people should live in accordance to an approved way of live and once this is done, peace is assured. Peace-culture to Lunenburg and Ornstein (2003) implies shared philosophies, ideologies, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, expectations, attitudes, norms, and values. It is the function of the school to instill in both staff and students these principles of living in tolerating others in their differences and diversity. Appreciating this fact, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2009), in the National Policy on Education advocated in section 3-(d) that schools should serve as an agent for inculcating national consciousness, values, and national unity. Section 19-(d) of the objectives of junior secondary education is to inspire national consciousness and harmonious co-existence irrespective of differences in endowment, religion, ethnic, and socio-economic background. In reality, the principals have a responsibility of working to fulfill these objectives as an instrument of building peace-culture in their schools. This is because without peace, an individual cannot discover and fulfill his goals, and invariably the school cannot achieve its goals. According to Okwudiba (2006), the ways of promoting and sustaining peace-culture include: having good leadership, good followership, non-violent value system, preservation of human rights, fear of God, and respect for man. Also, others include: mutual commitment between those in support of free flow of communication as a necessary strategy for conflict resolution, sensitiveness in adopting a pragmatic approach in forestalling early conflict signals, and introducing appropriate remedies timely. Furthermore, principals are expected to embrace these

values for a socially harmonious existence that benefits all, builds a peaceful environment for all, and stimulates progress.

However, Akpuru-Aja (2007) had noted that peace does not mean the absence of conflict or war. Whether one is aware of it or not, conflict exists either by perception or reality. Evidence abound that conflict exists in secondary schools in Anambra State and has been observed to have most often threatened the peaceful co-existence of staff and students. Thus, this resulted in poor teaching learning outcome because where there is no peace, there is no progress. This development is based on the fact that every member of the school is endowed with his/her natural perceptions, ideologies, beliefs, values, needs, personality types, and idiosyncrasies which he/she brings carries into the school system. Onoyase (2003) made it clear that since these individuals are pulled together under the umbrella of a school, they are apparently there to achieve a common purpose. Therefore, at the same time, they are driven by their desire to achieve their own personal goals which if not fully achieved, may likely result to misunderstanding and conflict. Individuals may disagree over goals, decision alternatives, performance criteria, and school resource allocations. Equally, the poor communication of principals, staff, and students act to retard collaboration and stimulate misunderstanding (Robbins & DeCenzo, 2003).

Based on the foregoing, Obi (2004) defined conflict as any divergence of interests, objectives, or priorities between individuals, groups or organizations, or the non-conformity to the requirements of tasks, activity, or process. He further stressed that conflict involves opposite needs in action. This needs include the apparent incongruency between the human need of teachers working in a school and the needs of the school system. Similarly, Ezegebe in Asiegbe and Egboka (2013) clarified that conflict is a mutual hostility in inter-human relationships. Mutual hostility as he described it can occur in form of insults, name-calling, stepping into another's shoes, sarcasm, false accusations, withdrawal of love and support, unpaid salaries, sudden transfer, termination, demotion, boycott of classes, open violence, and suspicion. These are apparently common in the secondary schools. Hence, they are affecting the accomplishment of the school's goals due to their resultant stress, hostilities, and other undesirable factors when poorly managed.

Moreover, there has been an increasing wave of in-disciplinary behavior in all the strata of the school system. Ibi (2001) recorded that principals are known to have issued queries, confrontations, seized salary of teachers who were found wanting in discharging their duties, and withdrawal/ transfer of duties. To Wasagu (2002), most teachers are never in school regularly and when they are, they conduct their teaching business haphazardly. Some teachers as he noted, absent themselves from duties.

Even when they are in school, they would remain in the staff room gossiping instead of attending to their classes. As a result, this creates room for students' engagement in some disruptive behavior. Some students as noted by Onoyase (2007) are often found loitering around the school compound and outside the school premises during classes. Some engage in quarrelling, fighting, gossiping, and other acts of undesirable behavior. Thus, this would most likely negate the objective of peace-culture that enhances students' critical and holistic thinking skills, as well as instilling in them the societal values and ethics.

Most often, the way and manner some principals handle these indisciplinary acts of both teachers and students, have led to misunderstanding, disagreement, suspicion, and violence. This scenario has led Johnson (2003) to note that the interpersonal behavior and leadership skills of the principals are explored as a possible source of conflict. The administrative style adopted by principals is imperative in determining the degree of teachers' cooperation, without which principals may be rendered ineffective. In addition, peace can give way to aggression, bickering, hatred, misconception, and misrepresentation. The overall consequence of this is that the success of teaching and learning is jeopardized.

In spite of the fact that conflict is a normal part of organization's life which provides numerous opportunities for growth through improved understanding and insight, there is a tendency to view conflict as a negative experience caused by abnormally difficult circumstances. Thus, this manifests in incompatibility, disagreement, or differences among staff. Therefore, they need to be carefully handled by the principals if peace is to be promoted in the school. Studies by Ibi (2001) and Obi (2004) showed that when conflict is not adequately managed, lives and properties, and academic hours of unimaginable magnitude would be lost. Delay in resolution of school conflict results in disruptions of academic calendars leading to economic as well as psychological exertion. Thus, it is expedient to devise appropriate strategies for effective management of conflict if peace must reign in schools.

Effective conflict management strategy is the planned process required in any educational institution to arrive at a decision in the best way of handling and resolving conflicts in order to promote peace-culture and build a platform for better educational attainment. Akubue (2002) stated that utilization of effective conflict management is the principal's ability to create numerous means of effectively managing and resolving crises whenever they occur, either between him/her and teachers, teachers themselves, students themselves, or students and school authorities. The managerial competences of principals as school administrators depict specific strategy to be used in resolving specific crisis. The view of Obi (2004) was corroborative, when he

described that the strategy adopted in handling and resolving conflict depends on the nature of the issue involved, as well as the personality dispositions of the actors in the conflict.

Management techniques for dealing with conflict as opined by Lunenburg and Orsistein (2003) include established procedures for bringing together opposing sides of crisis, promoting full communication among them, achieving mutual satisfactory compromises, and developing compensatory mechanism to deal with threatening stresses and strains which enables all actors or sub-units that were affected to make all the necessary adjustments on their own activities. Webne-Bchrman in Asiegbu and Egboka (2013) outlined the following strategies as being effective for managing conflict for peace in a work place: scholar know thyself and take care of self, identify a safe place for negotiation, take a listening stance into the interaction, assert your needs clearly and specifically, approach problem solving with flexibility, and build an agreement that works. Webne-Behrman explained that these strategies as mentioned would not guarantee an agreement, but they would greatly improve the likelihood that the problems can be understood. Consequently, solutions can be explored and consideration of the advantages of a negotiated agreement can occur within a relatively constructive environment. Therefore, this creates a healthy atmosphere for peace. The principal is thus expected to act as top strategist, systematically working with staff in utilizing effective conflict management strategies for promoting harmonious existence that benefits all, builds a peace environment, and stimulates progress for a healthy educational achievement.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The innate desire for effective conflict management as an instrument for promoting peace, harmony and unity, not only in the educational institutions but also in the entire organizational system, has been a thing of concern to the policy makers as well as the stake holders in education. Conflict shows up in an almost infinite variety of ways in the secondary schools in Anambra State. This ranges from poor teacher commitment, teachers and students' indiscipline, insults, defamation of character, name-calling, false accusations, non-tolerance of differences in others, sarcasm, misconceptions, and misrepresentations among others. Due to this situation, developing and promoting peace-culture as an instrument for effective and efficient academic achievement has become a great challenge to the principals. The principal therefore grapples with and navigates through myriads of problems on how to create a non-violent value system, obtain a harmonious coexistence of all staff and students, and understanding one another individual differences among others.

Therefore, it becomes worrisome whether the principals in Anambra state do actually adopt and utilize effective conflict management strategies for promoting peace-culture. Consequently, there is the need to carry out investigation on the principals' adoption and utilization of effective conflict management strategies as a necessity for promoting peace-culture in secondary schools in Anambra State.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the effective conflict management strategies adopted by principals in secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. To what extent do principals utilize the effective conflict management strategies for promoting peace-culture in secondary schools in Anambra State?

### **Hypotheses**

The following two null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and vice-principals on the effective conflict management strategies adopted by principals.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and vice principals on the extent principals utilize effective conflict management strategies for promoting peace-culture in secondary schools in Anambra State.

### **Method**

The study adopted descriptive survey design. According to Nworgu (2015), descriptive survey design is the collection of data using questionnaire for the purpose of describing and interpreting existing conditions or quality regarding a given population. The population of the study comprised of all the 254 principals and 254 vice-principals (Administration) in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Five hundred and eight (508) respondents consisting of the entire 254 principals and 254 vice-principals (Administration) in the public secondary schools in the State constitute the population for this study (Source: Department of Statistics, Post Primary School Services Commission (PPSSC), Awka in August, 2014). The entire population was studied and as such, there was no sampling.

The researchers developed a questionnaire which was titled: Adoption and Utilization of Conflict Management Strategies for Promoting Peace-culture (AUCMSPP). The questionnaire was designed for both principals and vice-principals. It was divided into two parts: part 'A' has an

open statement that sought information on the respondents' job description (principal or vice-principal). On the other hand, part 'B' is made up of two sections: section 1 with eleven items requires the respondents to rate their responses in a 4-point scale of strongly agree (SA) 4 points, Agree (A) 3 points, Disagree (DA) 2 points, and Strongly Disagree(SD) 1 point. Section 2 also has eleven items which requires the respondents to rate their responses on a 4-point scale which ranges from: Very High Extent (VHE) 4 points, High extent (HE) 3 points, Low extent (LE) 2 points, and Very Low Extent (VLE) 1 point.

Furthermore, the validation of the instrument was done by two experts in educational management and policy, and an expert in measurement and evaluation. They were all from the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The corrections they made were effected before producing the final copy of the instrument. For reliability of the instrument, test and retest method was adopted in testing for the internal consistency of the instrument. The test was conducted using 10 principals and 10 vice-principals from 10 secondary schools in Enugu State. Subsequently, the test was conducted two times, separated by a time interval of two weeks. The scores of the respondents were subjected to statistical analysis based on the Cronbach alpha procedure for testing reliability which yielded an index of 0.86. Hence, this was considered to be satisfactory for the study. The researcher with the help of three research assistants visited the respondents in their offices and distributed 508 copies of the questionnaire as appropriate. Only 247 out of the 254 principals returned their copies. Also, 251 out of 254 vice-principals duly filled and returned their copies. Thus, 10 copies were lost and 498 copies representing 98% return rate were retrieved and used for the data analysis.

Mean ratings and standard deviation were used in analyzing the questionnaire items for answering the research questions. The decision rule for interpreting the mean scores of the data was 2.50. Therefore, this is the cut-off point for accepting an item as the degree of adoption or utilization of effective conflict management strategies for peace-culture as indicated by the respondents. In addition, the t-test was used for testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

## **Results and Findings**

**Research Question 1:** What are the effective conflict management strategies adopted by principals in secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of principals and vice-principals on the effective conflict management strategies adopted by principals.

S/N	Items Vice-Principals	Principals					
		x	Decision	SD	x	Decision	SD
Effective conflict management strategies Adopted by principals include:							
1.	Establishing procedure for bringing together the opposing sides of the crises	2.68	A	0.95	2.61	A	0.98
2.	Promoting full communication among the parties in conflict	2.81	A	0.77	2.11	DA	0.85
3.	Allowing third party intervention	2.15	DA	0.88	2.00	DA	0.90
4.	Identifying a safe place for negotiation	1.81	SD	0.75	1.67	SD	0.99
5.	Giving listening ears to each party	2.75	A	0.85	2.38	DA	0.70
6.	Allowing a clear and specific presentation of one's needs	2.00	DA	0.89	2.10	DA	0.93
7.	Approaching problem solving with flexibility	2.75	A	1.00	2.55	A	0.86
8.	Managing impasse with calm and patience	1.38	SD	1.01	7.41	SD	0.85
9.	Leading parties to self-awareness	2.41	DA	0.92	2.32	DA	0.91
10.	Forcing the parties to discuss their differences in an open climate	2.28	DA	0.84	2.20	DA	0.89
11.	Using persuasion and compromise	2.17	SD	0.76	1.90	DA	0.84
Grand Mean		2.25	0.87	DA	2.11	0.88	DA

In table 1, items 1, 2, 5, and 7 have mean ratings that exceeded the cut-off point of 2.50 in the column for principals. However, this indicates that they are effective conflict management strategies adopted by principals. The rest of the seven items got mean ratings below 2.50, showing that they are the effective conflict management strategies not adopted by the principals. For the vice principals, only items 1 and 7 scored above 2.50. Thus, this suggests that they are the only effective conflict management strategies adopted by the principals. The rest of the nine items scored below 2.50. Thus, this indicates that they are the effective conflict management strategies not adopted by the principals.

Therefore, the grand mean for both principals and vice-principals were 2.25 and 2.11, respectively. However, they were less than 2.50. This suggests that both principals and vice-principals agree that principals in Anambra State do not adopt effective conflict management strategies. The standard deviation shows that the responses of principals and vice-principals' rating for each item was slim, indicating that their responses were homogenous.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent do principals utilize effective conflict management strategies for promoting peace-culture in secondary schools?



Table 2. Mean ratings and standard deviation of principals and vice-principals on the extent of principals' utilization of effective conflict management strategies for promoting peace-culture in secondary schools.

S/N	Items	Principals			Vice-		
		X	SD	Decision	X	SD	Decision
	The extent of principal utilization of effective conflict management strategies to promote peace-culture includes:						
12	Non-violent value system	2.22	1.13	LE	2.11	0.94	LE
13	Preservation of human rights	2.15	1.06	LE	1.63	0.95	LE
14.	Fear of God as a basic necessity for morality	1.81	0.91	LE	1.64	0.81	LE
15.	Flow of communication among staff and students	2.60	0.93	HE	2.62	0.98	HE
16.	Religious tolerance	2.75	1.01	HE	2.61	0.82	HE
17.	Harmonious Coexistence of all Staff and students	1.01	0.88	LE	2.18	0.84	LE
18.	Obedience and respect for authorities	2.31	1.00	LE	2.38	0.75	LE
19.	Commitment to duty	2.33	0.78	HE	2.22	0.95	LE
20.	Understanding of one another individual differences	1.98	0.87	LE	2.15	1.00	LE
21.	Trusting one another	2.00	1.05	LE	2.01	0.91	LE
22.	Loving one another	2.05	0.91	LE	2.11	0.84	LE
	Grand Mean	2.24	0.96	LE	2.15	0.89	LE

In table 2, items serial numbers 15 and 16 were rated above the cut-off mean of 2.50 by the principals. Therefore, this indicates that they are the only indices of peace-culture principals utilized for effective conflict management strategies. The remaining nine items in both the principals and vice principals column were below 2.50. Therefore, this shows that they are the items of peace-culture principals that have low extent in utilizing effective conflict management.

The grand mean in the principal's column is 2.24, while that of the vice-principals is 2.15. Therefore, both mean ratings fall below 2.50, indicating that the extent of principal's utilization of effective conflict management strategies for promoting peace-culture in secondary schools in Anambra State is low. With respect to the standard deviation, the ratings of both principals and vice-principals of each item was slim, suggesting homogeneity of responses.

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of principals and vice principals on the effective conflict management strategies adopted by principals in promoting peace-culture.

Table 3. t-test for principals and vice-principals mean ratings of principal's effective conflict management strategies.

Variation	No	X	SD	DF	T-ca	t-crit	Remark
Principals	247	2.25	0.97				Not
Vice-principal	251	2.11	0.88	498	1.69	1.96	Significant

$P > 0.05$ ,  $t$  calculated  $1.03 < t$  critical  $1.96$

As shown in table 3, the  $t$  calculated was 1.69, while the  $t$ -critical was 1.96 with 498 degree of freedom tested at 0.05 level of significance. The  $t$ -calculated was less than the  $t$ -critical, which indicates that the  $t$ -test was not significant. Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected, indicating that no significant difference exists in the mean ratings of principals and vice principals on the effective conflict management strategies adopted by principals.

Table 4. t-test for principals and vice-principals' mean ratings on the extent of principal's utilization of effective conflict management strategies for peace-culture.

Variation	No	X	SD	DF	T-ca	t-crit	Remark
Principals	247	2.24	0.99				Not
Vice-principal	251	2.15	0.89	498	1.07	1.96	Significant

$P > 0.05$ ,  $t$  calculated  $0.89 < t$  critical  $1.96$

Table 4 shows a calculated  $t$ -value of 1.07 with a critical  $t$ -value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. The  $t$ -calculated was less than the  $t$ -critical and therefore null hypothesis was not rejected. This implies that no significant difference exists in the mean ratings of principals and vice principals on the extent principals utilize the effective conflict management strategies for promoting peace in the schools.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that principals agreed that they adopt effective conflict management strategies such as: establishing procedures for bringing together the opposing sides of the crisis, promoting full communication among the parties in conflict, giving listening ears to each party, and approaching problem with flexibility. This finding agrees with an earlier study made by Egwunyenga and Enueme (2005). On the other hand (apart from these few strategies), the result indicated that both the principals and vice-principals were of the opinion that principals do not adopt the overwhelming majority of the effective conflict management strategies. Thus, this is evident in the grand mean of 2.25 and 2.11 of the principals and vice-principals respectively, which fell below the cut-off mean of 2.50. The test of the null hypothesis was not significant suggesting that there are no variations in the views of principals and vice-principals on the principal's adoption of effective conflict management strategies for promoting peace culture. Supporting this finding, Obi (2004) and Asiegbu and Egboka (2013) observed

that the failure of principals to adopt the conflict management strategies has resulted in a poor approach of handling conflict related issues. There is therefore the need for principals to adopt these strategies as an instrument for peace. These instruments include third party intervention, allowing a clear and specific intervention of one's needs, identification of safe place for negotiation, leading parties to self awareness, forcing the parties to discuss their differences in an open climate, and the use of persuasion and compromise.

The result also revealed that the extent of principals' utilization of effective conflict management strategies for promoting peace-culture in secondary schools is low. This is revealed by the responses of both the principals and vice-principals with average mean response of 2.24 and 2.15, respectively. Therefore, this fell below the cut-off mean of 2.50. The test of null hypothesis was not significant, suggesting that there was no variation in the opinion of the principals and vice-principals. This is supported by Onayase (2006) when he opined that the inability of principals to utilize effective conflict management strategies in promoting non-violent value system, preservation of human rights, and harmonious coexistence of all staff and students among others, has led to the breakdown of law and order in secondary schools. Hence, this leads to a total negation of peace-culture. No wonder bickering, misconceptions, tale bearing, defamation of character, teacher absenteeism amongst others, has continued to rail its ugly heads in the secondary schools in Anambra State. The test of hypothesis was not significant probably because of the fact that both principals and vice principals are in the same administrative cadre which may likely show their similar opinion.

However, to achieve the objective of secondary education aimed at inculcating national consciousness, peace, and harmonious co-existence especially as it is apparent that conflict cannot be avoided in the schools, principals should learn to adopt and utilize effective conflict management strategies to promote all activities geared towards enhancing peace. This is quite urgent especially now that the drums of peace are getting louder in Anambra State. Also, it has a global awareness creation that no educational system can progressively make a good academic achievement in a conflict environment.

## **Conclusion**

One of the greatest challenges facing principals today is how to promote peace-culture through effective conflict management strategies. This becomes very important in view of the increasing incidences of violence, crises of all sorts, misconception, and in-disciplinary behaviours, amongst others in the secondary schools. Results of this study revealed that secondary school principals in Anambra State might not meet this challenge. Thus, this is because the extent of their adoption and utilization of the effective strategies for conflict

resolution and management that could assist them to attain the highest educational achievement on a platform of established peace-culture was low.

### **Recommendations**

Consequent upon these findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Principals as a matter of urgency should be meant to see the need for adopting effective conflict management strategy to assist them in promoting the culture of peace in secondary schools.
2. All Nigerian Conferences of Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPSS) should see the urgent need of providing training opportunities for all principals through local seminars and workshops to expose the principals on the necessities for utilizing effective conflict management strategies in promoting peace in their respective schools.
3. Levels of utilization of effective conflict management strategies should be a prerequisite in appointing principals especially now that the Federal Government of Nigeria sees peace-culture as a necessity for achieving sustainable development in education. Adopting this measure would be a signal to every principal that the process of adopting and utilizing effective conflict management strategies is a panacea for promoting peace in schools.

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