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COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES OF PRINCIPALS FOR QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOL IN ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

This study examined communication and conflict management strategies of principals for quality teaching and learning in public and private secondary schools in Enugu State. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. From a population of 25,579 a sample of 1,278 participants made up of 860 private and 418 public secondary schools teachers was drawn using multi-stage sampling procedure. A questionnaire titled "Principals' Communication and Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire" (PCCMSQ) was used for data collection. The questionnaire was validated by three experts, two from Department of Educational Management and Policy and one from Department of Educational Foundations (Measurement and Evaluation) all in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Internal consistency coefficients of 0.80 and 0.84 were obtained for the two parts of the PCCMSQ using Cronbach's Alpha method. An overall reliability co-efficient of 0.82 was obtained for the entire questionnaire. Data were analyzed using mean for the research questions and t-test for the hypotheses. The p-value was used to determine the significance of difference at 0.05 significant level. The result revealed that the mean score for public secondary school principals was greater than that of their private school counterpart in adoption of effective communication strategies. Public and private secondary school principals in Enugu State adopted conflict management strategies for quality teaching and learning in secondary schools in Enugu State.

Key words: Communication, Communication strategies, Conflict management Strategies, Quality Teaching and Learning.

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Introduction

Governments of nations all over the world are identifying with the crucial role that secondary school education plays in the development of the economy. Improving the quality of secondary school education is particularly important for all states in Nigeria. This is because education at the secondary school level plays a key role in equipping the youths with the necessary knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes to serve in various sectors of the economy. In other words, secondary school education develops in individuals qualities needed for work in different sectors of the Nigerian economy.

Secondary schools in Nigeria are categorized as either public or private. According to Ugwu (2023), public secondary schools are post-primary institutions of learning established, controlled and financed by the government. Public secondary schools are day or boarding schools owned either by the federal or state governments, while private secondary schools are schools owned by the private sector as sole proprietors or joint partnership, such as individuals, churches and voluntary organizations.

Both public and private secondary schools share similarities in using the same curriculum in teaching, although the main differences between a private and public school is how they are funded, the school size and class size. Private schools are not government funded and rely on other means of funding, such as endowments and donations. This means that tuition can be higher for a private school than a public one. Even at the expensive nature of private secondary schools, a lot of parents still prefer to send their children and wards to private schools because they feel that

private school owners maintain quality education and high standards more than their public counterpart.

At the head of every secondary school is a principal whose role essentially is to cater for the character formation and intellectual development of the students. The principal is the chief executive of the school and owes it a duty to modify the attitude of staff and students by creating conducive and peaceful environment for teachers to put in their best towards achieving school goals. This he does by adopting appropriate communication and conflict management strategies that will ensure that consistent progress is made towards the achievement of quality teaching and learning in the school.

Communication according to Ogbo, Obiekwe and Emere (2020), is an administrative tool employed by principals to influence school operations through human interactions. It serves as the life wire of any effective school and successful administrators are trained and equipped to impact the whole school process through effective communication. Communication involves two or more persons sharing personal feelings, purposes and knowledge, and making concerted efforts to understand each other. Communication in schools takes place between and among principals, teaching and non-teaching staff, students as well as other stakeholders. The goals of the school are shared by principals with relevant individuals within the school system through communication. Not only this, the management of human, material, time and information which are the main resources in schools cannot be effectively and efficiently utilized without effective communication strategies.

Apart from effective communication, management of conflict is also an important strategy employed by principals in the school to maintain peaceful co-existence within the school. Conflict is any clash or disagreement in ideology, values and opinions of two or more persons. Conflict is inevitable in an organization but the ways it is managed can positively or negatively affect the behaviour and interpersonal relationships of members of staff in the school. Madubuegwu, Ugwuozor, Onwe and Udenta (2022), averred that conflict management is variety of ways by which administrators handle, respond to and deal with grievances before, during and after it has occurred. The approaches or procedures of managing conflict in public and private schools could shape the school atmosphere. Iloakasia (2022), noted that successful conflict management occurs by listening to and providing opportunities to meet the needs of all the parties and to adequately address interests, so that, each party is satisfied with the outcome. Effective management of conflict can enhance quality teaching and learning in the school.

Quality teaching can be seen as that which leads to improved students' achievement using outcomes that matter to their future success (Okeke, 2020). Quality teaching and learning is the ability of the teacher and the students to be in conformity with the education laws and policies which will at the end make the product of a school (students) to render useful services to the society and themselves. It can also be seen as the process of ensuring that the degree of excellence specified is achieved.

Quality teaching and learning can be greatly enhanced if public and private secondary school principals employ communication and conflict management strategies in the administration of secondary education in Nigeria and indeed Enugu State. However, observable situation in some public and private secondary schools in Enugu State casts a shadow of doubt as to whether principals actually adopt effective communication and conflict management strategies in the

administration of secondary schools in the State. This is because principals appear to be grappling with management challenges such as poor learning environment, ineffective communication as well as continuous clashes among staff.

National Center for Education Statistics, NCES (2017), reports that private schools are better than public schools in a number of policy areas such as discipline, effective communication, decision making and students' health and welfare services. Ugwu (2023), however argued that principals in public secondary schools seem to be more experienced and knowledgeable in terms of discipline, management of conflict, instructional supervision and staff development when compared with their counterparts in private schools.

More so, the prevalence of several indicators of indiscipline cutting across public and private schools in Enugu State such as bullying, insolence, failure to carry out assignments, insubordination, aggression, damage to school facilities is altogether worrisome. These situations therefore made it imperative to comparatively analyze public and private secondary school principals' communication and conflict management strategies for quality teaching and learning in secondary schools in Enugu State.

Statement of the Problem

Principals of both private and public are expected to be educational visionaries, communication experts, conflict managers as well as guardians of various legal, contractual and policy mandates and initiatives. However, the situation in some public and private secondary schools in Enugu State casts a shadow of doubt as to whether principals are actually living up to these expectations.

Some public secondary schools in Enugu State appear to be grappling with management challenges such as ineffective communication and persistent conflicts among staff. The surge in the number of private secondary schools in the State some of which are yet to secure approval from government and the seeming preference for private schools by parents and guardians is a testament that all may not be well with public schools in the State. Private schools appear better than public schools in a number of policy areas such as discipline, effective communication, decision making and students' health and welfare services. On the contrary, some researchers have argued that the whelming interest of private schools in profit making negatively affects the quality of teachers they employ, staff development and discipline among other areas.

Principals of public secondary schools in Enugu State have been adjudged to be more experienced, knowledgeable and better than their private school counterparts in terms of staff development and conflict resolution. More so, the prevalence of several indicators of indiscipline cutting across public and private schools in Enugu State such as lateness to school, bullying, insolence, insubordination, aggression, damage to school facilities is altogether very worrisome. If this trend is not mitigated urgently, the realization of quality teaching and learning in secondary schools in the State may become a mirage. This study therefore compared public and private secondary school principals' communication and conflict management strategies for quality teaching and learning in secondary schools in Enugu State.

Purpose of the Study

This study compared public and private secondary school principals' communication and conflict management strategies for quality teaching and learning in Enugu State Nigeria. Specifically, this study compared:

1. public and private secondary school principals' communication strategies for quality teaching and learning in secondary schools in Enugu State.
2. public and private secondary school principals' conflict strategies for quality teaching and learning in secondary schools in Enugu State.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the public and private secondary school principals' communication strategies for quality teaching and learning in secondary schools in Enugu State?
2. What are the public and private secondary school principals' conflict management strategies for quality teaching and learning in secondary schools in Enugu State?

Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of public and private secondary school teachers on their principals' communication strategies for quality teaching and learning in public and private secondary schools in Enugu State?
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of public and private secondary school teachers on their principals' conflict management strategies for quality teaching and learning in public and private secondary schools in Enugu State?

Method

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study which was carried out in public secondary schools in Enugu State, Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study and two hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. From a population of 25,579 teachers, a sample of 1,278 consisting 860 private and 418 public secondary school teachers was drawn using a multistage sampling procedure. Researchers' developed instrument titled Principals' Communication and Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire (PCCMSQ) which was validated by three experts was used for data collection. The questionnaire was structured on a four point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A) Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1. The internal consistency of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach's Alpha and this yielded reliability coefficients of 0.80 and 0.84 for the two parts of the PCCMSQ. The instrument was considered reliable in line with Nworgu (2015), who stated that if the co-efficient obtained for an instrument is up to 0.70 and above, the instrument should be considered good enough to be used for a study. The direct administration and retrieval method was used for data collection. A total of 1,278 copies of the questionnaire were administered while 1,022 representing 80% were retrieved and was used for data analysis. Mean was used to answer the research questions while t-test was used to test all the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. For the research questions, a mean rating of 2.50 and above was interpreted as agree while mean rating of

less than 2.50 was interpreted as disagree. The null hypothesis was rejected where the p-value associated with the t-cal was less than 0.05 whereas the null hypothesis was not rejected where the p-value was greater than 0.05.

Results

Table 1: Mean Ratings on Principals' Effective Communication Strategies for Quality Teaching and Learning in Public and Private Secondary Schools in Enugu State

	Public (n=415)			Private (n=607)		
	Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
1. Notifies teachers about goals and objectives of the school.	2.98	.77	Agree	2.93	.74	Agree
2. Provides informal communication channels (e.g staff social gathering).	3.05	.80	Agree	2.95	.78	Agree
3. Provide formal communication channels to let teachers know clearly what is going in the school.	3.07	.77	Agree	2.98	.76	Agree
4. Holds meetings with staff to discuss equipment design for effective instruction.	3.41	.63	Agree	3.23	.76	Agree
5. Makes effective use of suggestion boxes in school administration.	3.33	.62	Agree	3.22	.75	Agree
6. Maintains an open door policy in running the school.	3.20	.59	Agree	3.11	.70	Agree
7. Allows one-on-one interaction with the teachers.	3.08	.58	Agree	3.03	.70	Agree

Table 1 shows respondents' mean ratings on principals' communication strategies for quality teaching and learning in private secondary schools Enugu State. The analysis shows that teachers in public and private secondary schools agree that their principals adopt all the seven listed communication strategies in their schools for quality teaching and learning. However, the mean ratings for public school principals for all the seven items are greater than that of their counterparts in private schools on communication strategies for quality teaching and learning. The mean for public secondary school principals range from 2.98 to 3.41 while that of private school principals range from 2.93 to 3.23.

Table 2: Mean Ratings on Principals' Conflict Management Strategies for Quality Teaching and Learning in Public and Private Secondary Schools in Enugu State

	Public (n=415)			Private (n=607)		
	Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
1. Find a middle course to break deadlock during conflict resolution	2.84	.81	Agree	2.80	.75	Agree

2.	Hold joint sessions with conflicting parties for amicable resolution of their grievances	2.18	.89	Disagree	2.23	.83	Disagree
3.	Embrace regular dialogue for amicable managing of conflicts	2.60	.95	Agree	2.77	.87	Agree
4.	Use authority to impose will as solution to conflict	2.83	.77	Agree	2.85	.73	Agree
5.	Apply existing rules in settling conflict	3.06	.72	Agree	2.95	.75	Agree
6.	Take hasty decision in resolving conflict without consulting anybody	2.15	.87	Disagree	2.18	.82	Disagree
7.	Overlook some conflicts with the hope that it will go away.	2.80	.79	Agree	2.81	.77	Agree
8.	Set up committee for peaceful resolution conflict in school	2.70	.84	Agree	2.62	.82	Agree

Table 2 shows teachers mean ratings of their principals' conflict management strategies for quality teaching and learning in public and private secondary schools Enugu State. The mean ratings show that teachers in public and private schools agree that their principals adopt six of the eight listed conflict management strategies. The mean ratings for public school principals on the six strategies are greater than their private school counterparts. Public and private secondary school teachers however, disagree with items 60 and 64 as part of the conflict management strategies adopted by their principals with mean scores of 2.18 and 2.15 for public schools and 2.23 and 2.18 for private schools.

Table 3: t-test Summary of the ratings of Public and Private Secondary School Teachers on Their Principals' effective communication strategies for Quality Teaching and Learning in Public and Private Secondary Schools in Enugu State

Source of variation	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t-cal	*P*-value	Remark
Public	415	3.16	.54				
				1020	2.55	.01	Sig
Private	607	3.06	.59				

The results in Table 3 show that the mean score for public secondary school teachers (M=3.16, SD=.54) is significantly greater than that of those in private schools (M=3.06, SD=.59); t (1020) =2.55, p=.01. The null hypothesis of no significant difference between the two groups on their principals' effective communication strategies for quality teaching and learning in public and private secondary schools in Enugu State is therefore rejected.

Table 4: t-test Summary of the ratings of Public and Private Secondary School Teachers on Their Principals' Conflict Management Strategies for Quality Teaching and Learning in Public and Private Secondary Schools in Enugu State

Source of variation	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t-cal	*P*-value	Remark
Public	415	2.65	.36				
				1020	.28	.77	Not-Sig
Private	607	2.65	.37				

Table 4, shows that the mean score for public secondary school teachers (*M*=2.65, *SD*=.36) is not significantly greater than that of those in private schools (*M=2.65, SD=.37*; *t (*1020*)* =5.23, *p*=.77. The null hypothesis of no significant difference between the two groups on their principals' conflict management strategies for quality teaching for quality teaching and learning in public and private secondary schools in Enugu State is therefore not rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study are discussed under the following subheadings:

Principals' Communication Strategies for Quality Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools in Enugu State.

Findings of the study showed that both public and private secondary school principals adopted communication strategies for quality teaching and learning in secondary schools in Enugu State. The mean scores for public secondary school principals ranged from 2.98 to 3.41 while that of private school principals ranged from 2.93 to 3.23 indicating that public school principals were rated slightly higher than their private school counterpart in terms of adoption of communication strategies. This finding is in line with Nwogbo, Nwankwo and Nwachukwu (2019) who found that principals of public schools adopt communication strategies such as: holding meetings with staff to discuss equipment design for effective instruction, making effective use of suggestion boxes in his school administration, maintaining an open door policy in running the school and allowing teachers to give their own suggestions on matters concerning them. These findings agree with Asiyai (2011) that effective communication is important in maintaining conducive school environment for quality teaching and learning. This is because principals are supposed to communicate rules and expectations of the schools to the staff and students to know the consequences of their actions. The findings of the present study are also in line with the findings of Mgbodile, (2014), who found that when effective communication is maintained by principals it enhances awareness, enlightenment involvement, feelings of belongingness and performance effectiveness. Effective communication abilities of the principals are indispensable in improving teacher quality teaching and learning. Therefore, when principals adopt effective communication strategies, teacher quality of teaching and learning in school will be enhanced.

The study also revealed through the test of hypothesis that there was a significant difference in the mean ratings of public and private secondary school teachers on their principals' effective communication strategies for quality teaching and learning in public and private secondary schools in Enugu State. This finding does not align with that of Nwogbo, Nwankwo and Nwachukwu (2019) that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of public and private secondary school teachers on the communication strategies adopted by principals for teacher effectiveness in Enugu State. The reason for this difference may be attributed to the difference in time and location when both studies were carried out.

Principals' Conflict Management Strategies for Quality Teaching and Learning

As shown by the finding, public and private secondary school principals in Enugu State adopted conflict management strategies for quality teaching and learning in secondary schools in Enugu State. This is not entirely surprising because principals of both public and private secondary schools appear to be aware of the importance conflict management in the achievement of quality teaching and learning. This finding is supported by Uwaezuoke and Obiekwe (2021) who found that principals adopt various conflict management practices in the administration of secondary schools. This finding does not support Din, Khan, Rehman and Bibi (2011) who found a low level of conflict management in public and private institutions.

The test of the hypothesis showed no significant difference in public and private teachers' mean ratings of principals' conflict management strategies for quality teaching and learning in secondary schools in Enugu State. This finding aligns with Uwaezuoke and Obiekwe (2021) who found no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals' conflict management in public and private secondary schools in Anambra State. This affirmed the finding of Din, Khan, Rehman and Bibi (2011) who revealed that there was no significant difference in the conflict management of public and private institutions.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that public secondary school principals perform better than their private school counterparts in effective communication and conflict management.

Recommendations

1. Private secondary school principals should be encouraged to make educational information available to teachers through effective communication. This will help teachers discharge their duties effectively.
2. Public and private secondary school principals should be encouraged to continue in their adoption of effective conflict management strategies in order to inspire peaceful climate that will enhance the quality of teaching and learning in their schools.

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