COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS OF CONFLICT AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EBONYI STATE

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ABSTRACT: *The study investigated the counselling implications of conflict and conflict resolution in secondary schools in Ebonyi State. Specifically the study assessed the extent to which school principals adopt dialogue, arbitration, third party and sanction in conflict resolution in their schools. The population for this study consisted of all the principals of public Secondary Schools numbering one hundred and fourty-seven (147), and the entire population was used. Four research questions and one null hypothesis guided the study. The instrument for data collection was a four point modified likert-type questionnaire – conflict resolution assessment scale (CRAS), while the data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions and t-test for the hypothesis. The findings showed that while sanction was used to a great extent, dialogue, arbitration and third party were used to a low extent. Again, gender of principals does not significantly influence the type of conflict resolution method used. The counselling implications of the findings were outlined including: the fact that people have problems which should not be taken for granted or sub-summed in their conflict. Recommendations were also made for example that Government officials who relate with the school authority should also be involved in dialogue, arbitration and third party methods of conflict resolution instead of just using sanction as the only option.*

KEYWORDS: Conflict, resolution, counselling, dialogue, arbitration, third party and sanction

INTRODUCTION

Conflict has been defined by Ezegbe (1997) as mutual hostility in inter-human relationships. Okoro (1998) identified intra-personal conflict – where an individual has two competing desires which he is unable to resolve, and inter-personal conflict – where two or more individuals or group of people are incompatible. He further observed that conflict is an obstacle in achieving desired goals, and if unresolved degenerate to enmity, clashes and wars. Conflict resolution as explained by Alu (2002) entails the use of various methods like dialogue, arbitration, third party and sanction to bring about peace among organizations and between individuals. In sanction various bodies are made to impose sanctions on the conflicting parties unlike dialogue where the people in conflict are brought together to expose them to the issues of conflict with a view to helping them to understand the matters clearer.

Again in arbitration an arbitrator is invited to settle the conflict by appealing to the conscience of those concerned, this is similar to the third party where the conflicting groups are invited by a third party who urges them to open up and speak out their grievances. The problem of role conflict in the school system and strike actions by teachers; in addition to other problems like indiscipline, examination malpractice, drug abuse and cultism amongst students need proper approach in conflict resolution which in turn has counselling implication for effective school management.

Counselling as Mallum (1990) saw it is "an interpersonal relationship, usually between two individuals, a Counsellor and a Client, in which the principal objectives are the development of the client, the improvement of his welfare and the amelioration of his problems." (Pg 14). School teachers and students need to resolve their intra-personal problems which could affect their self concept and perception with its concomitant interpersonal relationship with others. A counsellor could be that arbitrator or third party needed in conflict resolution or even the person dialoguing with the warring parties in conflicts.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

The Gestalt theory of Perls (1894-1970) works on the assumption that human beings always work as a whole. Each person is not a summation of parts, but a coordination of all parts. The idea of wholeness or gestalt controls the health of a person as an appropriate balance of the coordination of all of what we are. The ego boundary is the differentiation between self and others. A person is able to identity with his friends, colleagues and family members; which results in cohesion, co-operations and love. Alienation, on the other hand results in strangeness, unlikeness and conflict. Conflict has already been defined by Ezegbe (1997) as mutual hostility in inter-human relationships, and inter-personal conflict. This means that two or more individuals or group of people are incompatible. This incompatibility may arise as a result of compartmentalization of an individual instead of seeing the 'gestalt' or wholeness that he embodies. Fundamental in the concept of gestalt therapy is the clash between social and biological existence. May people try to actualize what they 'should' be like rather than actualize themselves as they are? Conflict arises due to this false self.

Purpose of the Study

The study sought to assess the extent to which school principals adopt dialogue, arbitration, third party and sanction in conflict resolution in their schools, and the counselling implication of neglecting these methods of conflict resolution.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided the study and they include, to what extent:

1. sanction is used by school principals in Ebonyi State to achieve conflict resolution;

2. dialogue is used by school principals in Ebonyi State to achieve conflict resolution;

3. arbitration is used by school principals in Ebonyi State to achieve conflict resolution, and

4. third party is used by school principals in Ebonyi State to achieve conflict resolution.

Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of the conflict resolution methods adopted by the male and the female principals in secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

METHODS

A descriptive survey research design was adopted to collect data from all the principals in the government owned secondary schools in Ebonyi State, and since their number is manageable the entire population of 147 was used. (Source: Planning and Research Statistics Unit of Secondary Education Board Ebonyi State - 2011). The instrument for data collection was a researcher made instrument named conflict resolution assessment scale (CRAS) which is a

four – point modified likert scale with four clusters (A - D) and 20 items. The instrument was subjected to face, content and construct validation by experts in the field. The reliability of the instrument was established for internal consistency using the Crombach Alpha which yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.69 after a test-retest carried out on some selected teachers in the state. The supervisor related factor variable was controlled by the pre-survey workshop for all research assistants

RESULTS

The results of the study were presented in tables 1 – 5 based on the research questions and hypothesis raised.

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

To what extent is sanction used by school principals in Ebonyi State to achieve conflict resolution?

Table 1: Mean rating of the extent to which sanction method is adopted for conflict resolution is secondary schools in Ebonyi State

Items	Methods related to sanction	$\bar{x}$	SD
1	Withholding the salary of principals and teachers by the Secondary Education Board	3.88	1.03
2	Denial of fringe benefits of conflicting parties by the principal	3.54	1.12
3	Denial of promotion of principals and teachers by the Secondary Education Board.	3.26	0.44
4	Demotion of principals and teachers by the secondary Education Board.	3.09	0.34
5	Suspension of students from school by the principal	3.45	0.34
	Grand mean	**3.46**	**0.65**

Results of data analysis presented on Table 1 show that sanction is adopted to a great extent in resolving conflict in secondary schools in Ebonyi State. The grand mean for the responses is 3.46 and SD of 0.65 on a 4-point scale. The grand mean is above 2.5 decision rule; therefore it shows that sanction is used to a great extent.

Research Question Two

To what extent is dialogue used by school principals in Ebonyi State to achieve conflict resolution?

Table 2: Mean rating of the extent to which dialogue method is adopted for conflict resolution is secondary schools in Ebonyi State

Items	Methods related to dialogue	$\bar{x}$	SD
6	Dialogue between students and students	1.86	0.72
7	Dialogue between students and teachers	2.24	0.64
8	Dialogue between teachers and principals	2.32	0,57
9	Dialogue between school authority and Government	1.96	0.65
10	Dialogue between principal and community leaders	2.76	0.62
	Grand mean	**2.13**	**0.64**

Results of data analysis presented on Table 2 shows that dialogue is adopted to a less extent in resolving conflict in secondary schools in Ebonyi State. On the 4-point scale grand mean responses is 2.13 which is below the 2.5 decision rule and hence it can be concluded that dialogue is not used to a great extent.

Research Question Three

To what extent is arbitration used by school principals in Ebonyi State to achieve conflict resolution?

Table 3: Mean rating of the extent to which arbitration method is adopted for conflict resolution is secondary schools in Ebonyi State

Items	Methods related to arbitration	$\bar{x}$	SD
11	Round table discussion between staff and government officials	2.16	0.46
12	Intervention of the parents/teachers association (PTA)	2.23	0.57
13	Intervention of the clergymen in the community	1.86	0.62
14	Intervention of the community leaders	2.26	0.64
15	Joint arbitration conferences between community staff and conflicting parties	2.32	0.58
	Grand mean	**2.16**	**0.57**

The summary of the results presented in Table 3 indicated that for arbitration the grand mean 2.16 below the 2.5 decision rule showing the arbitration is employed to less extent in Ebonyi State secondary schools for resolving conflicts.

RESEARCH QUESTION FOUR

To what extent is third party used by school principals in Ebonyi State to achieve conflict resolution?

Table 4: Mean rating of the extent to which third party method is adopted for conflict resolution is secondary schools in Ebonyi State

Items	Methods related to third party	$\bar{x}$	SD
16	Invitation of the principals and teachers by government officials for mediation	1.65	0.64
17	Invitation of students in conflict by teachers	2.67	0.62
18	Invitation of students and teachers by the principal	2.86	0.64
19	Invitation of the conflicting parties by the community association	1.76	0.58
20	Invitation of the conflicting parties by the stakeholders of the school	2.24	0.58
	Grand mean	**2.23**	**0.61**

The result of the data analysis for table 4 also shows that third party is employed to less extent as a method of conflict resolution in Ebonyi State secondary school; since the grand mean for the items amounted to 2.23 which is also less than the decision rule of 2.25.

Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of the conflict resolution method adopted by the male and the female principals in secondary schools in Ebonyi State

Table 5: t-test statistic table showing conflict resolution methods used by male and female principal of secondary schools in Ebonyi State

Item	Variable	$\bar{x}$	SD	t-cal	Alpha	t-critical	Decision
1	Male	1.679	0.704	1.60	0.05	1.96	Accept
	female	1.348	0.758				Ho
2	Male	3.692	0.817	1.88	0.05	1.96	Accept
	female	3.511	0.616				Ho
3	Male	2.496	0.575	1.21	0.05	1.96	Accept
	female	3.767	0.437				Ho
4	Male	1.274	0.599	0.74	0.05	1.96	Accept
	female	1.224	0.362				Ho
5	Male	2.793	0.794	0.95	0.05	1.96	Accept
	female	3.813	0.446				Ho
6	Male	3.830	0.377	6.60	0.05	1.96	Reject
	female	3.476	0.577				Ho
7	Male	2.526	0.513	0.76	0.05	1.96	Accept
	female	3.768	0.433				Ho
8	Male	1.076	0,712	6.37	0.05	1.96	Reject
	female	2.377	0.486				Ho
9	Male	2.427	0.668	1.04	0.05	1.96	Reject
	Female	3.273	0.828				Ho
10	Male	3.071	0.704	3.30	0.05	1.96	Accept
	Female	3.391	0.578				Ho
11	Male	1.467	0.215	0.14	0.05	1.96	Accept
	Female	1.332	0.533				Ho
12	Male	2.153	0.242	0.13	0.05	1.96	Accept
	female	2.771	0.722				Ho

13	Male	3.207	0.592	3.53	0.05	1.96	Reject
	Female	3.430	0.531				Ho
14	Male	2.437	0.536	0.24	0.05	1.96	Accept
	Female	2.122	0.678				Ho
15	Male	1.483	0.836	-1.51	0.05	1.96	Accept
	Female	1.610	0.638				Ho
16	Male	3.732	0.416	1.25	0.05	1.96	Accept
	female	3.563	0.479				Ho
17	Male	3.421	0.577	0.43	0.05	1.96	Accept
	Female	3.209	0.754				Ho
18	Male	3.582	0.542	0.60	0.05	1.96	Accept
	Female	3.546	0.489				Ho
19	Male	3.124	0.634	1.32	0.05	1.96	Accept
	female	3.295	0.657				Ho
20	Male	3.365	0.587	-1.63	0.05	1.96	Accept
	Female	3.487	0.657				Ho

The summary of data analysis for table 5 indicates that for individual items 1,2,3,4,5,7,9,11,12,14,15,16,17,18,19 and 20 have their t-critical value greater than the t-calculated while only 6,8,10 and13 have their t-calculated greater than t-critical value – 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance. Based on the decision rule the null hypothesis was accepted, hence it was concluded that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of the conflict resolution method adopted by the male and the female principals in secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS

Perls (1971) saw the goal of Counselling/therapy as the client's maturation and the removal of "blocks that prevent a person from standing on his own feet." The group leader/Counsellor in Gestalt therapy helps the members to make the transition from external to internal support by locating the 'impass' - that is, the place where people get stuck – the point at which they avoid experiencing threatening feeling and attempt to manipulate others by playing the game of helpless, lost, confused and stupid. The Gestalt therapy will aid in making people to take responsibility for their actions instead of blaming others for their problems, which is what happens in a conflict situation. Again, the implication of Mallum's definition of counselling (1990) is that people have problems which should not be taken for granted or sub-summed in their conflict, they need counselling to be able to adjust in the 'self' dominated societies that they find themselves. Another angle to the amelioration of their problems could also be in the counselling of significant individuals who relate with them in various ways and their attitude towards the needs of others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study have revealed that Ebonyi State Secondary School principals employ sanction more than dialogue, arbitration or third party in conflict resolution in the school system. It appears that many of them may not be aware of the various methods of conflict resolution. It is therefore recommended that:

1. Workshops or seminars be organized to train school teachers and head teachers on the various methods of conflict resolution to help them in resolving conflicts that arise in the course of their discharging their duties.

2. Government officials who relate with the school authority should also be involved in dialogue, arbitration and third party methods of conflict resolution instead of just using sanction as the only option.

3. Guidance counsellors should be posted as a matter of necessity to all the schools, since they are trained to use dialogue and to arbitrate between conflicting parties as significant third parties in resolving conflicts.

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