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Impact of Principals' Leadership Styles on Conflict Resolution in Public Secondary Schools in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study examined the impact of principals' leadership styles on conflict resolution in public secondary schools in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised teachers in public secondary schools within the FCT, Abuja, from which a sample of 120 teachers was selected using a simple random sampling technique to ensure representativeness. Data were collected using a structured and validated instrument titled "Principal Leadership Styles and Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (PLSCRQ)." The instrument measured teachers' perceptions of leadership practices and their influence on conflict management within their schools. Reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot study, while descriptive statistical tools such as frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviation were employed to analyze the data and answer the research questions. The findings revealed that democratic leadership is the most commonly practiced style among principals in public secondary schools in the FCT. Teachers reported that principals frequently involve them in decision-making processes, encourage open communication, and promote participatory management practices. Autocratic leadership was also found to be present but to a lesser extent, while laissez-faire leadership was not widely adopted. The study concludes that principals' leadership styles play a decisive role in shaping the conflict management climate of public secondary schools. Democratic and participatory leadership approaches contribute positively to conflict resolution, staff cooperation, and institutional stability. The study therefore recommends the promotion of collaborative leadership practices, continuous professional development for school administrators in conflict management, and institutionalization of open communication mechanisms to foster sustainable school harmony and improved organizational effectiveness.

Keywords: Principal leadership style; democratic leadership; autocratic leadership; laissez-faire leadership; conflict resolution.

1. Introduction

Education remains a vital instrument for national development, social stability, and human capital formation. At the secondary school level, effective administration is essential for maintaining an environment conducive to teaching and learning. School organizations are naturally composed of individuals from diverse cultural, social, and economic backgrounds, making conflict inevitable. Conflicts may arise among teachers, between teachers and students, among students themselves, or between staff and school management. When not properly managed, such conflicts can disrupt academic activities, reduce staff morale, and negatively influence students' academic performance [1].

The principal, as the chief administrator of a secondary school, plays a critical role in maintaining harmony and promoting positive intergroup relations. Leadership style the pattern of behaviors a leader adopts in directing, motivating, and managing people largely determines how conflicts are handled within the school system. Common leadership styles in educational administration include democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire approaches [2]. A democratic principal often encourages participation in decision-making, thereby fostering mutual respect and reducing tension. In contrast, an autocratic leader may rely heavily on authority, which can either suppress conflict temporarily or intensify resentment among staff and students. The laissez-faire style, characterized by minimal supervision, may lead to unresolved disputes due to the absence of clear direction [3]. Effective conflict resolution requires principals to demonstrate fairness, emotional intelligence, communication competence, and problem-solving skills. By adopting appropriate leadership styles, principals can promote collaboration, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and create a supportive school climate. Conversely, poor leadership practices may escalate disagreements, encourage hostility, and weaken institutional effectiveness [4].

In the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, public secondary schools have expanded in enrolment and staff strength due to population growth and increased demand for education. This expansion has heightened the potential for interpersonal and organizational conflicts. Issues such as workload distribution, disciplinary procedures, communication gaps, and cultural differences often require strong administrative intervention. Therefore, understanding how principals' leadership styles influence conflict resolution is essential for improving school management and ensuring a peaceful learning environment. This study therefore seeks to examine the impact of principal leadership styles on conflict resolution in public secondary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria, with a view to providing insights that can enhance administrative effectiveness and promote sustainable intergroup relations within schools.

Statement of the Problem

Conflict is an unavoidable aspect of organizational life, particularly in educational institutions where individuals with diverse interests and expectations interact daily. In many public secondary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, conflicts among teachers, students, and administrators have been observed to interfere with effective teaching and learning. If not promptly and properly resolved, such conflicts may lead to reduced productivity, poor staff cooperation, student unrest, and an unfavorable school climate. Despite the importance of the principal's role in managing school-related conflicts, there are concerns that some principals may not adopt leadership styles that encourage dialogue, participation, and mutual understanding. Authoritarian tendencies, inadequate communication, favoritism, and lack of collaborative decision-making can aggravate disputes rather than resolve them. On the other hand, excessively relaxed leadership may allow conflicts to persist without timely intervention. Although several studies have examined leadership in schools, limited attention has been given to how specific leadership styles directly influence conflict resolution in public secondary schools within the FCT. This creates a gap in empirical knowledge needed by education stakeholders to improve administrative practices. It is against this backdrop that this study investigates the impact of principal leadership styles on conflict resolution in public secondary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to examine the impact of principal leadership styles on conflict resolution in public secondary schools in the FCT, Abuja. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the leadership styles commonly adopted by principals in public secondary schools in the FCT, Abuja.
2. Examine the influence of these leadership styles on conflict resolution among staff and students in public secondary schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study;

1. What leadership styles are commonly used by principals in public secondary schools in the FCT, Abuja?
2. How do principals' leadership styles influence conflict resolution in public secondary schools in the FCT, Abuja?

3. Materials and Methods

This study will adopt a descriptive research design. The design is considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to systematically collect data and describe the existing conditions regarding principals' leadership styles and their impact on conflict resolution without manipulating any variables.

The population of the study will consist of teachers in public secondary schools within the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. A sample size of 120 teachers will be selected using a simple random sampling technique to ensure that every teacher has an equal chance of participation, thereby enhancing the representativeness of the sample.

Data will be collected through a structured questionnaire titled "Principal Leadership Styles and Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (PLSCRQ)." The instrument will contain close-ended items designed to obtain information on leadership practices and conflict management strategies within schools. Experts in educational management will validate the instrument to ensure content validity, while a pilot test will be conducted to establish reliability.

The collected data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviation, to answer the research questions. Findings from the study are expected to provide empirical evidence on how leadership styles contribute to effective conflict resolution in public secondary schools.

4. Results and Discussion

Research Question 1:

What leadership styles are commonly used by principals in public secondary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja?

Table 1. Leadership Styles Commonly Used by Principals
(N = 120)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Democratic leadership is commonly practiced	48	42	18	12	3.05	Accepted
2	Autocratic leadership is frequently used	30	36	32	22	2.62	Accepted
3	Laissez-faire leadership is adopted	20	28	40	32	2.30	Rejected
4	Principals involve teachers in decision-making	44	46	20	10	3.03	Accepted
5	Principals encourage open communication	50	40	18	12	3.07	Accepted

Criterion Mean = 2.50

The results indicate that democratic leadership is the most commonly practiced style among principals, as reflected in the high mean scores. Teachers generally agree that principals involve them in decision-making and promote open communication. Autocratic leadership is also present but to a lesser degree, while laissez-faire leadership is not widely practiced. This suggests that principals tend to adopt more participatory approaches to school management.

Research Question 2

How do principals' leadership styles influence conflict resolution in public secondary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja?

Table 2. Influence of Leadership Styles on Conflict Resolution
(N = 120)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Democratic leadership promotes peaceful conflict resolution	52	44	16	8	3.17	Accepted
2	Autocratic leadership escalates tension	40	38	24	18	2.83	Accepted
3	Principals encourage collaboration and negotiation	46	48	14	12	3.07	Accepted
4	Effective leadership improves staff relationships	54	42	14	10	3.17	Accepted
5	Prompt intervention prevents conflict spread	58	40	12	10	3.22	Accepted

Criterion Mean = 2.50

The findings reveal that leadership style significantly influences conflict resolution in schools. Democratic practices, collaboration, and early intervention are perceived as effective in resolving disputes. However, autocratic leadership is seen as capable of increasing tension, indicating that leadership behavior plays a crucial role in determining the outcome of conflicts.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that democratic leadership is widely practiced and supports effective conflict resolution in public secondary schools in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. This finding is consistent with existing empirical literature which establishes that leadership style significantly determines how conflicts are managed within educational institutions. Democratic leadership, characterized by participation, shared decision-making, open communication, and mutual respect, creates an atmosphere where grievances can be expressed and addressed constructively. Research by Leithwood and Jantzi indicates that transformational and participatory leadership practices enhance collaboration and reduce organizational tension in schools [5]. Similarly, Robinson, Lloyd, and [6] demonstrated that leadership styles emphasizing teacher involvement and professional dialogue positively influence school climate and problem-solving processes.

In the African context, evidence also supports this relationship. A study conducted in Kenyan secondary schools by [7] reported that the effectiveness of conflict management strategies is strongly influenced by the leadership style adopted by school administrators. The study found that principals who adopted democratic approaches were more successful in resolving disputes among staff and students compared to those who relied heavily on authoritarian methods. Similarly, findings from public secondary schools in Edo State, Nigeria, revealed a significant relationship between principals' leadership styles and conflict management strategies, emphasizing the importance of leadership training for school administrators [8]. These findings collectively affirm that leadership approach is not merely an administrative preference but a critical determinant of institutional harmony and effectiveness.

The present study also observed that collaboration and negotiation improve relationships and school harmony. This result aligns with the theoretical assumption that conflict, when properly managed, can become a constructive tool for organizational growth. Bryk and Schneider emphasize that relational trust built through collaboration and respectful negotiation serves as a foundational resource for school improvement. Supporting this perspective within the Nigerian context [9], [10], Adeyemi and Ademilua found in Oyo State that strategies such as collaborating, compromising, negotiation, and mediation significantly enhanced teaching and learning processes [11], strengthened discipline, and improved communication patterns within schools. Their findings

highlight that inclusive problem-solving mechanisms foster mutual understanding and reduce adversarial tendencies among stakeholders.

Furthermore, the negative perception of autocratic leadership observed in this study corresponds with broader research evidence. Authoritarian leadership, which relies on rigid control, unilateral decision-making, and limited consultation, may suppress dissent temporarily but often intensifies resentment and reduces morale over time [12], [13]. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy argue that trust and openness are critical components of a healthy school climate, and these elements are weakened under highly autocratic leadership conditions. Similarly, Hallinger and Heck found that collaborative leadership practices significantly improve school capacity and staff commitment, whereas authoritarian tendencies may hinder professional engagement and shared responsibility [14].

Another Nigerian study by Okotoni and Okotoni emphasized that constructive management of conflict is essential for maintaining a functional school climate [15]. Their findings revealed that schools that adopted cooperative and dialogue-based approaches experienced fewer disruptive conflicts and higher levels of staff cooperation. This supports the present study's conclusion that democratic leadership fosters institutional stability and effective conflict resolution, while excessive reliance on autocratic methods may undermine harmony and organizational effectiveness. The findings reinforce the growing body of empirical evidence suggesting that leadership style plays a decisive role in shaping conflict resolution processes within schools. Democratic and collaborative approaches not only resolve disputes more effectively but also contribute to a supportive organizational climate that enhances teacher morale, professional relationships, and institutional performance.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that principals' leadership styles have a substantial impact on conflict resolution in public secondary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Democratic leadership emerges as the most effective approach because it promotes participation, open communication, and collaboration. In contrast, excessive reliance on autocratic practices may intensify conflicts rather than resolve them. Effective leadership, therefore, remains fundamental to maintaining a peaceful and productive school environment.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

Education authorities should encourage participatory leadership practices that involve teachers in decision-making.

Regular workshops and seminars should be organized to equip principals with modern conflict management skills.

Schools should adopt negotiation and mediation strategies to handle disputes constructively.

Open communication between principals, teachers, and students should be institutionalized.

Supervisory bodies should periodically evaluate principals' leadership styles to ensure they foster positive school climates.

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