Dynamics of Conflict Management Strategies as A Predictor to Secondary School Climate in the North West Region of Cameroon

Cho Browndon Achu¹, Wanyu Patrick Kongnyuy²
¹Ph.D Fellow, Department of Educational Leadership, ²Associate Professor,
¹,²Faculty of Education of the University of Bamenda

Abstract
This research was aimed at evaluating the extent to which principals’ conflict management strategies predict secondary school climate in the North West Region of Cameroon. The study had six objectives, five research questions and five hypotheses. Related literature was reviewed theoretically, conceptually and empirically. The survey research design was used in this study which involved the use of predetermined sets of questions generally in form of questionnaires. The purposive sampling technique, simple random sampling technique and the accidental sampling technique were used. The sample of this study was made up of 80 Principals and 331 teachers both male and female, from government, mission and private secondary schools of general education. The instruments used for data collection were the questionnaire for quantitative data collection and interview guide and focus group discussion for qualitative data collection. Analysis of statistical data was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20.0 with results presented on tables and figures. Multiple regression analyses was used to measure the association between the variables, without distinction between the independent and dependent variables. The bivariate correlation was used to evaluate the degree of relationship between all the variables of this study at 0.01 level of significance. The researcher used the bivariate regression to evaluate the relationship between the independent and dependent variables to predict the score of the dependent variable from the independent variables. The findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between conflict management by collaboration and secondary school climate (r =0.747), there is a significant relationship between conflict management by accommodation and secondary school climate (r =0.795), there is a significant relationship between conflict management by compromise and secondary school climate (r =0.696), there is a significant relationship between conflict management by competition and secondary school climate (r =0.336), there is a significant relationship between conflict management by avoidance and secondary school climate (r =0.215). From the results of the findings, the researcher recommends that principals and other school heads and administrators should receive adequate training on conflict management.

Key words: Conflict, Predictor, Management strategies, accommodation.

Introduction
Going from Thucydides, Grotius, Plato and Aristotle, mankind has been dominated by conflicts. Conflicts have become part and parcel of human organizations over the world and so, there is a need for every functional organization to have some binding rules and regulations for its smooth running and effective productivity. According to Mbau (2003), the main actors involved in a school setting are the school administrators (principal), teachers and students. These personalities interact and so determine the school climate. It is due to this pondering interactions and interrogations that caught the researchers’ attention to carry out a research on “Conflict Management Strategies as a Predictor to School Climate”.

Ositoye, Adebayo, Alade and Omolade (2012) classified the types of conflict into: (a) intra-
personal; which occurs within an individual (b) inter-personal which occurs between individuals in the same organization; meaning that as individuals relate and interact in the same organization in achieving set objectives, because of the differences that exist in them as individuals and in the organization, there is bound to be such conflict situation and (c) inter-group; which occurs between groups consequent upon their contact and interaction.

**Contextual Background**

In an arena of outright bestiality of wanton conflicts in our society, the intellectual capacities of our citizens play a very important role in developing our nation- Cameroon. Having in mind section 2 of law No 98/004 of 14th April 1998 to lay down guidelines for education which among others states that education shall be the top priority of the nation. The success or failure of schools in Cameroon will highly depend on the School administration. It is for this reason that the National Forum for Education which held in Yaounde from 22 to 27 of May 1995 highlighted the poor administrative and pedagogic management of our secondary schools. Despite all the human financial and material resources and good efforts put in place by the government and educational stakeholders to enhance good education in Cameroon, so many types of conflicts such as value conflict, substantive conflict, conflict of interest, goal conflict, misattributed conflict, affective conflict etc. continue to plague our schools. As educational institutions are becoming larger due to the high and increasing demand for education, conflicts are bound to occur due to interactions among individuals from different backgrounds. If these conflicts are not properly managed by the school administrators (principals) it may affect the school climate. Anja and Bassey (2006), observed that educational institutions are a complex community as they are often made up of people from different backgrounds in terms of needs, values, goals, skills, concepts, competences and other diverse characteristics.

**Statement of the Problem**

UNICEF (1995) affirmed that “conflicts when not dealt with constructively often explode into violence”. The school climate has been unhealthy and has not been a positive one. Roueche and Baker (1986) believe that the principal is the kingpin in establishing that climate, maintaining order, direction and coherence among all participants. In the process of dealing with the above-mentioned problems that arises from the school, so as to reduce them from escalating beyond management, school principals therefore adopt various conflict management strategies. Despite the measures put in place by the government and other stakeholders to minimize conflict in schools, there are always conflicts ranging from individual to group conflicts within the school. Hence leading to ineffectiveness in the teaching learning process. It is as a result of this that the researcher wishes to verify if Principal’s conflict management strategies predict secondary school climate in the North West Region of Cameroon.

**Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study is to evaluate the extent to which principals’ conflict management strategies predict school climate.

**Specifically, this study intended:**

1. To evaluate the relationship between conflict management by collaboration and school climate.
2. To investigate the relationship between conflict management by accommodation and school climate.

**General Research Hypotheses**

- **Alternative Hypothesis**

There is a significant relationship between principals’ conflict management strategies and school climate.
Null or Statistical Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between principals’ conflict management strategies and school climate.

Specific Research Hypotheses

The following specific hypotheses were formulated based on the variables under study:

$H_{a1}$: There is a significant relationship between conflict management by collaboration and school climate.

$H_{01}$: There is no significant relationship between conflict management by collaboration and school climate.

$H_{a2}$: There exists a significant relationship between conflict management by accommodation and school climate.

$H_{02}$: There exists no significant relationship between conflict management by accommodation and school climate.

Significance of the Study

This study will enable educational policy makers, other leaders or would be leaders to be versed with some conflict management strategies to apply in the management of conflicts. Also, from this study, curriculum planners will know the importance of including conflict management and resolution in the context of school administration and legislation.

Justification of the Study

Statistically, it has been observed that the secondary school climate in most secondary schools in the North West Region of Cameroon has not been the best over the years for teaching and learning to take place. The school climate has been unhealthy and has not been a positive one where there is communication and collaboration among participants in achieving the goals of the school. There have been widespread allegations in our national dailies and periodicals on the issue of poor standards of education in our school system.

Delimitation of the Study

Geographically, this study was limited to the North West Region of Cameroon. The study concentrated more on Government Secondary Schools in the above region. Few mission and lay private schools were considered in the study Thematically or content wise, the study examined principals’ conflict management strategies as a predictor to school climate.

Theoretical Framework


According to this theory, certain rules are to be used while managing and resolving conflicts. They include:

- **Make sure that good relationships are the first priority:** As far as possible, when managing/resolving a conflict, the manager (principal), should make sure to treat the parties involved calmly, and also try to build mutual respect. The manager should do his/her best to be courteous to one another and remain constructive even when under pressure.

- **Keep people and problems separate:** The manager (principal) must recognize that in many cases the other person is not just “being difficult”, real and valid differences can lie behind conflictive positions. By separating the problem from the person, real issues can be debated without damaging working relationships.

- **Pay attention to the Interests that are being presented:** by the manager listening carefully, he/she will most likely understand why the person is adopting his/her position.
Listen first; talk second: To solve a problem effectively, the manager (principal) has to be a keen listener. He/she has to listen keenly and understand the worries of the other person or conflicting parties before coming to a consensus or defending his/her own position.

Set out the “facts”: The manager here has to agree and establish the objective and observable elements that will have an impact on the decision.

Explore option together: Here, the manager has to be open to the idea that a third position may exist and that you can get to this idea jointly.

By following these rules, the manager (principal) can often keep contentious discussions positive and constructive. This helps to prevent antagonism and dislike which often causes conflicts to spin out of control.

Using the Tool: A Conflict Resolution Process

Based on these approaches, a starting point for dealing with conflict is to identify the overriding conflict style employed by yourself, your team or your organization.

According to this approach, over time, people’s conflict management styles tend to mesh and a “right” way to solve conflicts emerges. It is good to recognize when this style can be used effectively however, making sure that people understand that different styles/strategies may suit different situations. The manager in managing conflicts must first look at the circumstances and think about the style/strategies that may be appropriate. Then use the process below to resolve the conflict:

Step One: Set the Scene

If appropriate to the situation, agree to the rules of the Interest Based Relational Approach (or at least consider using the approach yourself). Make sure that people understand that conflict may be a mutual problem, which may be best resolves through discussion and negotiation rather than through raw aggression. If the manager (principal) is involved in the conflict, he/she should emphasize the fact he/she is presenting his/her perception of the problem. The manager should use active listening skills to ensure that he/she hears and understands other’s positions and perceptions.

- Restate
- Paraphrase
- Summarize

In addition, the manager makes sure that when talking, he/she uses an adult assertive approach rather than a submissive or aggressive style.

Step Two: Gather Information

Here, the manager (principal) tries to get the underlying interests, needs and concerns. He/she asks for the other person’s viewpoint and confirms that he/she respects his/opinion and needs his or her cooperation to solve the problem. The manager tries to understand his/her motivations and goals and sees how his/her actions may be affecting them. Also, the manager tries to understand the conflict in objective terms: is it affecting the school climate? Is it affecting work performance? Is it damaging the delivery of the client? Is it disrupting team work? Is it hampering decision making? And so on. The manager must be sure to focus on work issues and leave personalities out of the discussion.

- Listen with empathy and see the conflict from the other person’s point of view.
- Identify issues clearly and concisely.
- Use “I” statements.
- Remain flexible.
➢ Clarify feelings.

**Step Three: Agree the Problem**

This sounds like an obvious step, but often has different underlying needs, interests and goals which can cause people to perceive problems very differently. The manager (principal) here will need to agree to the problems that he/she is trying to solve before he/she will find a mutually acceptable solution. Sometimes, different people will see different but interlocking problems. If the manager cannot reach a common perception of the problem, then at a very least, he/she needs to understand what the other person sees as the problem.

**Step four: Brainstorm Possible Solutions**

If everyone is going to feel satisfied with the resolution, it will help if everyone has had fair input in generating solutions. The manager here should brainstorm possible solutions and be open to all ideas, including ones he/she never considered before.

**Step Five: Negotiate a Solution**

By this stage, the conflict may be resolved: both sides may better understand the position of the other and a mutually satisfactory solution may be clear to all. The manager however may also have uncovered real differences between his/her positions. Here, a technique like “win-win” negotiation can be useful to find a solution that can at least to some extend satisfy everyone. There are three guiding principles here which are:

➢ Be calm
➢ Be patient
➢ Have respect

**Relevance of the Theory to this Study**

This theory is relevant to this study because it explains laid down rules and guidelines that can be used in managing conflicts. It also explains five different stages or steps that can be used by leaders to effectively manage conflicts when they occur in an organization (school), thereby maintaining and upholding a positive school climate necessary for effective teaching and learning to take place.

**The Conceptual Review on Conflicts in Educational Organisations**

**Causes of Conflicts in Educational Organisations**

According to Titanji (2017), educational organisations are characterized by great diversity and this is more so in Cameroon which is commonly referred to as Africa in miniature. With members or stakeholders from all kinds of backgrounds, there are bound to be significant, demographic and other differences with the potential to affect how the same things are perceived. While advocates of the structural frame are of the opinion that conflicts are dysfunctional to an organisation, those of the political frame view them as part and parcel of the life of an educational organisation because of the following reasons:

**Scarcity of Resources:**

Scarcity of basic human and material resources constitutes one of the problems on the educational sector in Cameroon (Report of the Sector-wide Approach to Education, 2006, in Titanji 2017).

**Perceptions of unfair allocation of available human and material resources:**

According to Titanji (2017), the problem of scarcity is compounded by poor management of what is available. For example, schools in urban areas are likely to be overstaffed than those in rural areas. The allocation of resources is often based on objective criteria rather than on espoused needs. The process of resource allocation is rife with the potential for conflict.
a university, for instance, each faculty believes that it is qualified to have the highest budgetary allocations. Departments and faculties assume an identity which suggests that they do not care about the wellbeing of the others. This is why universities have been described as academic tribes.

**Diverse interest of stakeholders:**

Educational organisations are made up of many stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, administrators, religious denominations, ex-students, employers, members of civil society organisations, among others). Each of them is an interest group. An interest group is one that stands to win or lose as a result of what happens in schools. It has certain expectations of what schools ought to be doing and how to go about doing it. In other words, because we are likely to have different opinions about the purposes of education, there is bound to be disagreements, some with the possibility of degenerating into conflicts (Titanji, 2017).

**Dynamic environments:**

Educational organisations are characterized by change as are their environments. These are demographic changes in the student population, developments in science and technology, with implications for teaching and learning, changes in the expectations of various stakeholders, what each thinks should be taught, and economic changes among others. Rapid changes can lead to conflict partly because of characteristics of those being affected. Change is often associated with feelings of anxiety, loss, confusion and regret. It requires learning new ways of doing familiar things; and many people are not very flexible in their dispositions, especially when they consider associated costs of the adopted change as exceeding rewards (Titanji, 2017).

1. **Diversity of values or cultures:**

A cultural conflict occurs between groups or individuals with different value systems, beliefs, lifestyles and even different generations. Naturally, different generations of Cameroonian are likely to differ in terms of values. An older generation will often talk about the good old days while the present one looks with disdain at the values of their parents forgetting that they will someday talk about their own good old days aswell (Titanji, 2017).

- **Consequence stage**

In this stage, we have the result of obvious conflict. It is either solved, or there is no satisfactory solution and the conflict goes back to the latent conflict stage.

![Conflict process diagram](image)

**Figure 1: Conflict process according to Pondy's Model**

**Source:** Adapted from Gonan Bozac et al, 2008
Conflict as a Destructive Force

Traditional management theory (e.g. Taylor, 1911) emphasized organizational goals, managerial control and rationality. Conflict was seen as a problem attributable to some regrettable cause, troublemakers interfering with organizational goals (Morgan 1986). The initial studies of conflict, therefore, stemmed from the belief that it was dysfunctional to organizational harmony and performance. The elimination of conflict seemed to be the primary goal of any manager confronted with a conflict situation (Dipaola and Hoy, 2001; Putman, 1997). Bacal (1998) notes that at the back of a traditional manager’s mind, there is always a warning tone that once conflict is allowed to exist, it will get out of control and manifest as destructive. However research (e.g. Burke, 1970; Mullins, 1999) has shown that the negative aspects of conflict arise when conflict is affective and when team members engage in blocking behavior. In such a situation team members feel defeated and demeaned, there is a climate of mistrust, parties concentrate on their own narrow interests, poor quality decisions are made and achievement of organizational goals is blocked.

Conflict as a Constructive Force

Modern schools of management view conflict as an inevitable aspect of organizational life, which can be used to foster healthy organizational development (Johnson et al, 1996; Harrison, 1995; Morgan, 1986; DiPaola and Hoy, 2001). The pluralist view of conflict criticizes the classical tendency to over-emphasize the negative aspects of conflict because it distracts attention from conflicts’ potential benefits. To Morgan (1986) most functional outcomes of conflict emanate from cognitive conflict, which occurs as team members examine and reconcile differences. Studies have shown that cognitive conflict results in high quality solutions and team effectiveness. By facilitating open communication about alternatives, cognitive conflict encourages innovative thinking and creative solutions to problems. In cognitive conflict situations, decisions become better than the opinion of the leader or the most vocal, most powerful team member (Mullins, 1999). Once conflicting parties have reached consensus, team members support the decisions and team decisions are easier to implement. Henkin, et al, (2000) found that cognitive conflict develops solidarity among team members and heightens motivation.

From the preceding paragraphs, it is clear that although conflict may lead to the formation and maintenance of functional organizations, some managers continue to emphasize its negative consequences over its benefits.

Conflict Management Strategies within the School

According to Bisno, (1988) a conflict management strategy is an operational plan to achieve a conflict goal. Conflict management strategy can be defined as the behaviour towards the intensification, reduction and resolution of conflict (De Dreu et al., 1999). Follett (1941) identified three primary strategies that leaders use to manage conflict, namely openness (or collaboration), distribution (or non-confrontation), and control.

Lippit (1982) proposed five interpersonal conflict-handling behaviours: withdrawal or retreating from a conflict situation, smoothing or emphasizing areas of agreement and de-emphasizing areas of difference, compromising or searching for solutions that bring some degree of satisfaction to the conflicting parties, forcing or exerting one’s viewpoint at the potential expense of another and confrontation or addressing a disagreement in a problem-solving mode. To Morgan (1986) and Thomas (1976), a manager’s choice of a conflict management strategy hinges on whether he or she wishes to engage in assertive or co-operative behaviour. Using the assertive-co-operative model, Morgan (1986) identified five conflict management strategies and proposed that a manager may use one or a combination of methods to resolve organisational conflict.

1. Avoiding
According to Morgan (1986) avoiding means ignoring the conflict and letting fate take its course. It is based on the belief that conflict is unnecessary, inappropriate, dysfunctional and costly. A manager who uses the avoiding style is both unassertive and uncooperative. The managerial behaviours associated with the avoiding style are ignoring conflict in the hope that it will disappear, putting problems on hold, invoking slow procedures, use of secrecy and appealing to bureaucratic rule (Morgan 1986, Putman & Wilson, 1982). According to Applebaum et al, (1999), in certain circumstances the manager may be wise to avoid conflict.

Compromising

A manager who uses the compromising strategy is moderately assertive and moderately cooperative (Pondey, 1977). Compromising is a lose/lose strategy in which each of the contending parties gives up some of his or her original demands. It may be implemented through negotiation when the contenders look for tradeoffs and solutions acceptable to all in a give and take spirit. Compromising is used when opponents with equal power are committed to mutually exclusive goals (Morgan, 1986).

2. Controlling and/or Forcing

The controlling or forcing strategy which is highly assertive and uncooperative is a win lose strategy. Win/lose strategies are outcome-directed strategies where influence and power are the major resources of conflict management (Bacharach & Lawler, 1981). Controlling uses power to dominate and to ensure that one party wins at the expense of the other (Morgan, 1986; Hatfield & Hatfield, 1996). The manager who uses this style pays maximum attention to his own interests, while paying no attention to the concerns of others.

Accommodating

The accommodating strategy is highly co-operative and completely unassertive. The manager attempts to satisfy the concerns of his co-workers while paying little or no attention to his own concerns. The behaviours associated with this style include giving way and going along with the suggestion of co-workers, and attempting to satisfy the concerns of other people. This method is used when one realises that he or she lacks the ability or the resources to successfully engage in satisfying own interest. The method may be used when one finds that he or she is wrong or where one wants to satisfy others and maintain co-operation. Morgan (1986) has suggested that it can also be used to minimise loss when one is out-matched by superior power from an adversary.

3. Collaborating

This has been identified as the best method of resolving organisational conflict because it promotes commitment by incorporating the concerns of all parties. The manager who uses collaboration attempts to satisfy his own concerns as well as the concerns of his co-workers. Management exposes false consensus and provides opportunities for the articulation of differences. Cunningham (1998) contends that collaboration aims to resolve the conflict by means that are analytical and that get to the root of the problem. Managerial behaviours associated with collaboration include sharing information, investigating the underlying problems, searching for situations where all can win and seeing problems and conflicts as challenges.

The principal's dilemma is in knowing what behavior to use, as well as when to use the behavior in order to ensure that the integrity of the school system and its people are preserved. The five conflict management strategies of Thomas and Kilmann are examined below and figure 2 below equally summarizes Thomas-Kilmann Conflict management Strategies.

Accommodation

By accommodating you set aside your own personal needs because you want to please others in order to keep the peace. The emphasis is on preserving the relationship. Smoothing or harmonizing can result in a false solution to a problem and can create feelings in a person that
range from anger to pleasure. Accommodators are unassertive and cooperative and may play the role of a martyr, complainer, or saboteur. However, accommodation can be useful when one is wrong or when you want to minimize losses when you are going to lose anyway because it preserves relationships. If you use it all the time it can become competitive and may result in reduced creativity in conflict situations and increased power imbalances. The Accommodating Style is foregoing your concerns in order to satisfy the concerns of others. This style is low assertiveness and high cooperativeness; the goal is to yield. The accommodating style is appropriate to use in situations when you want to show that you are reasonable, develop performance, create good will, keep peace, retreat, or for issues of low importance. Accommodating style of conflict management can be good when it comes to maintaining a positive school climate because everyone in the school will be comfortable hence dedicate most of their time to perform their different teaching/learning activities.

Avoidance

Avoiding, commonly known as ‘sidestepping,’ can mean postponing the conflict, retreating, or withdrawing from the issue. Avoiding can be useful at times (Thomas, 2007). It may be appropriate when other issues are more important or when the principal believes there is no chance of satisfying his/her concerns. Avoiding is an unassertive as well as uncooperative behavior (Thomas, 2007). Here, the principal would not pursue his/her own goals or the goals of the teacher. He/she simply ignores or does not address the conflict. When the costs of a conflict are greater than the benefit, confronting the issue may not be worth the effort, or when a cool-down period is needed so that principal and/or teacher can regain perspective it may not be wise to immediately address the issue. Further, when more information is needed before addressing the issue, avoidance can be a good strategy, a third party may be better equipped to resolve the conflict more effectively, or the immediate issue could be symptomatic of another more fundamental problem that needs attention. A principal, however, could utilize too many avoiding behaviors.

Collaboration

The collaborative style views conflicts as problems to be solved and finding creative solutions that satisfy all the parties’ concerns. Collaboration takes time and if the relationship among the parties is not important, then it may not be worth the time and energy to create a win-win solution. However, collaboration fosters respect, trust, and builds relationships. To make an environment more collaborative, address the conflict directly and in a way that expresses willingness for all parties to get what they need. The Collaborating Style is when the concern is to satisfy both sides. It is highly assertive and highly cooperative; the goal is to find a “win/win” solution. Appropriate uses for the collaborating style include integrating solutions, learning, merging perspectives, gaining commitment, and improving relationships.

According to Burrell (2001), using this style can support open discussion of issues, task proficiency, and equal distribution of work amongst the team members, better brainstorming, and development of creative problem solving. This style is appropriate to use frequently in a team environment and very ideal for good performance and therefore its underuse can result in using quick fix solutions, lack of commitment by other team members, disempowerment, and loss of innovation and morale hence poor performance. Baumgardner (2012) adds that Collaboration is the way to achieve the best outcome on important issues as well as build good relationships since it takes into account all of the parties’ underlying interests.

Collaboration is when you partner/pair up with the other party to achieve both of your goals. It’s how you break free of the “win-lose” paradigm and seek the “win-win.” This can be effective for complex scenarios where you need to find a novel solution. This can also mean reframing the challenge to create a bigger space and room for everybody’s ideas. The downside is it requires a high-degree of trust, and reaching a consensus can require a lot of time and effort to get everybody on board and to synthesize all the ideas.
However according to Baumgardner, its underuse leads to unnecessary confrontations, frequent power struggles, and ineffective negotiating.

This is the “lose-lose” scenario where neither party really achieves what they want. This requires a moderate level of assertiveness and cooperation. It may be appropriate for scenarios where you need a temporary solution or where both sides have equally important goals. The trap is to fall into compromising as an easy way out when collaborating would produce a better solution.

**Figure 2: Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management Strategies**

_**Source:** Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management Strategies_

### Empirical Review

This section deals with research works which have been published on related issues concerning the subject matter. Under this section, the empirical studies are examined as per the objectives of the study.

#### Conflict Management by Collaboration and School Climate

A good number of studies have been carried out on conflict management by collaboration and school climate:

Muindi, Mwania and Metet (2017) carried out a study on the Influence of Collaboration as a Conflict Management Style on Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Makueni Sub-County, Makueni County, Kenya. The study sought to explore the impact of collaboration as a conflict management style on academic performance in secondary schools in Makueni Sub-county of Makueni County. It was guided by the poor performance of secondary schools students in their KCSE in Makueni sub-county despite the high marks the students scored in their KCPE. The population includes 18 principals and 54 teachers in the named sub-county. A random sample of 18 schools out of the 46 schools in the sub-county was selected for the study, that is, 18 schools where the 18 principals of the selected schools and 3 teachers from each of the 18 schools to make a total of 54 teachers. This was achieved through probability and purposive sampling respectively. The study employed the use of questionnaires to collect information on the impact of collaboration as a conflict management style on Academic performance. The findings indicated that most of the principals advanced their conflict management strategy by collaborating with others to make the performance of their schools a success since collaboration as a conflict management style significantly influences students’ performance in secondary schools. This is because as the study indicated, there is no statistically significant difference between the mean responses of the respondents on the influence of collaborating as a conflict
resolution style and students’ performance. The study recommends that principals in Makueni sub-county should embrace collaboration as a method of solving conflicts in their schools in order to achieve good performance.

**Conflict Management by Accommodation and School Climate**

Ozkan (2012) carried out a study on the investigation of conflict management strategies of principals as perceived by primary school teachers in Kilis-Turkey. The purpose of this study is to evaluate teachers’ opinions on primary school principal’s management styles and how frequently the principals use conflict solving skills in case of conflicts in schools. In this context, answers to the following questions were sought: what is the usage degree of school principals’ skills like integrating, compromising, dominating and avoiding; whether there is meaningful difference according to teachers’ perceptions school principal’s marital status, gender and principals’ experience. The design of the study is descriptive and 28-item Conflict Management Styles Survey was applied to 142 teachers. The results of the study revealed that according to the teachers, school principals use ‘integration’ skill more than other skills; according to the gender and marital status variable there is no meaningful difference among the teachers perceptions; according to principals’ experience variable there is meaningful difference concerning ‘domination’ style of the principals.

**Methodology**

This research design involves the use of predetermined sets of questions generally in form of questionnaires. This design was used since the study is aimed at determining the relationship that exists between principals’ conflict management strategies and school climate by gathering and analyzing data from teachers and principals in the Mezam Division of the North West Region of Cameroon who are considered to be a representative of the entire population and findings from this study will be generalized to all teachers and Principals in the North West Region of Cameroon.

**Population of the Study**

The population of the study involved principals and teachers in secondary schools in the North West Region of Cameroon.

**Sampling Techniques**

The sample of this study was made up of 80 principals and 331 teachers.

Purposive sampling was used to choose the Mezam Division among and the seven Divisions in the North West Region of Cameroon to carry out this study.

**FINDINGS**

The Findings were analyse hypothetically based on hypothesis one and two of the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>331</td>
<td>26.4713</td>
<td>4.18311</td>
<td>.22992</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean (26.47) of the collaboration strategy was higher than the hypothesized test value of 22.5. We can infer that the prevalence of the collaboration strategy was above average.

**Verification of hypothesis one**

**Ho1:** There exists no significant relationship between conflict management by collaboration and school climate.

To verify the above hypothesis, data was analyzed using linear regression analysis as presented below:
Table 2: Model summary showing explanatory power of management by collaboration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.747</td>
<td>.557</td>
<td>.556</td>
<td>3.73593</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A linear regression analysis was conducted to verify the relationship and the impact of conflict management by collaboration on school climate. The sample correlation is coefficient(R) was 0.747 indicating that 55.7% of the variance in school climate was accounted for conflict management. The correlation coefficient was 0.747; we can infer that there is a positive and strong relationship between conflict management by collaboration on school climate.

Table 3: ANOVA for regression analysis showing the explanatory conflict management by collaboration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Regression</td>
<td>5784.572</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5784.572</td>
<td>414.452</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>4591.905</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>13.957</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10376.477</td>
<td>330</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 reveals that conflict management by collaboration was significantly related to the school climate F (1, 329) = 414.452, P=0.000). Cognizant of the fact that the p value=0.000 which is less than 0.05 indicating a significant relationship between conflict management by collaboration and school climate, we reject the null hypothesis and uphold the alternative which states that there is a significant relationship between conflict management by collaboration and school climate.

Research Objective Two:

Table 4: One Sample Descriptive Statistic for Accommodation Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>27.4079</td>
<td>5.05843</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean (27.41) of the accommodation strategy was higher than the hypothesized test value of 22.5. We can infer that the prevalence of the collaboration strategy was above average.

Verification of hypothesis two

H₀₂: There exists no significant relationship between conflict management by accommodation and school climate

To verify the above hypothesis, data was analyzed using linear regression analysis as presented below:

Table 5: Model summary showing explanatory power of accommodation strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.795</td>
<td>.632</td>
<td>.631</td>
<td>3.40510</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows that a linear regression analysis was conducted to verify the relationship and the impact of conflict management by accommodation on school climate. The sample correlation is coefficient(R) was 0.795 indicating that 63.2% of the variance in school climate was accounted for conflict management by accommodation. The correlation coefficient was 0.795; we can infer that there is a positive and strong relationship between conflict management by accommodation and school climate.

Table 6: ANOVA for regression analysis showing the explanatory conflict management by accommodation
predicted school climate $F (5, 325) = 160.339, P = 0.000$) and competition strategy, collaboration, avoidance, accommodation, and compromise significantly predicted school climate. Hence, Table 7 reveals that all predictors significantly predicted school climate. All the combinations which states that there is a significant relationship between conflict management by accommodation and school climate, we reject the null hypothesis and uphold the alternative which is less than 0.05 indicating a significant relationship between conflict management by accommodation and school climate.

Table 6 reveals that conflict management by accommodation was significantly related to the school climate $F (1, 329) = 565.931, P = 0.000$. Cognizant of the fact that the p-value = 0.000 which is less than 0.05 indicating a significant relationship between conflict management by accommodation and school climate, we reject the null hypothesis and uphold the alternative which states that there is a significant relationship between conflict management by accommodation and school climate.

Table 7: ANOVA showing explanatory power of the two predictors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1172.170</td>
<td>41.898</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>27.977</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3036.583</td>
<td>231.449</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>13.120</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 reveals that all predictors significantly predicted school climate. All the combinations significantly predicted school climate. Hence, we conclude that a linear combination of competition strategy, collaboration, avoidance, accommodation, and compromise significantly predicted school climate $F (5, 325) =160.339, P=0.000$.

Table 8: Model fit showing the strengths of the sub variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95.0% Confidence Interval for B</th>
<th>Lower Bound</th>
<th>Upper Bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>5.087</td>
<td>1.691</td>
<td>3.009</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>1.762</td>
<td>8.413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>-.134</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>-.116</td>
<td>-3.538</td>
<td>-.208</td>
<td>-.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>.452</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.337</td>
<td>7.341</td>
<td>.311</td>
<td>.573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>2.409</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>.546</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>.493</td>
<td>10.417</td>
<td>.443</td>
<td>.649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>3.530</td>
<td>1.707</td>
<td>2.069</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.173</td>
<td>6.888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>-.115</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>-.100</td>
<td>-3.085</td>
<td>-.189</td>
<td>-.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>.396</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.296</td>
<td>6.383</td>
<td>.274</td>
<td>.519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>2.183</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>.453</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.409</td>
<td>7.965</td>
<td>.341</td>
<td>.565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compromise</td>
<td>.206</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.169</td>
<td>3.802</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>.313</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Linear hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted to verify the strengths of each component of the independent variable on the dependent variable. The regression equation for the standardized coefficients is as follows;

Predicted school climate = -0.100 competition strategy + 0.396 collaboration +0.098 avoidance +0.453 accommodation +0.206 compromise.
The highest index is that of accommodation (0.453) followed by collaboration (0.396) while the lowest is that of (-0.100). We can infer from these indices that accommodation and collaboration strategies appear to be a better predictor’s positive school climate while the competition and avoidance are poor predictors of positive school climate.

Verification of the difference in the mean of school climate for the different agencies

This study was aimed at assessing the extent to which conflict management strategies correlates to school climate in secondary schools. As such the following findings were arrived at:

- There is a significant relationship between conflict management by collaboration and school climate.
- There is a significant relationship between conflict management by accommodation and school climate.
- A linear combination of competition strategy, collaboration, avoidance, accommodation and compromise significantly predicted school climate.

**Effect of Conflict Management by Accommodation on School Climate**

Hypothesis two intended to find out if there exists a significant relationship between conflict management by accommodation and school climate. This hypothesis really aims to verify whether when principals manage conflicts in the school using the accommodation strategy, it will affect school climate in secondary schools in the North West Region of Cameroon. A linear regression analysis was conducted to verify the relationship and the impact of conflict management by accommodation on school climate. The sample correlation is coefficient(R) was 0.795 indicating that 63.2% of the variance in school climate was accounted for conflict management by accommodation. The correlation coefficient was 0.795; we can infer that there is a positive and strong relationship between conflict management by accommodation and school climate. ANOVA for regression analysis showing the explanatory conflict management by accommodation results revealed that conflict management by accommodation was significantly related to the school climate F (1, 329) =565.931, P=0.000). Cognizant of the fact that the p value=0.000 which is less than 0.05 indicating a significant relationship between conflict management by accommodation and school climate, we reject the null hypothesis and uphold the alternative which states that there is a significant relationship between conflict management by accommodation and school climate.

This therefore implies that when the accommodation strategy is used to manage conflicts in secondary schools, it predicts the school climate. To Connie and CFCS (2002), the accommodating style means surrendering one’s own needs and wishes to please the other person. According to Olson and DeFrain (2001), people who opt for an accommodating style deny themselves to put their interest last and let others have their way. Many times, they say, such people believe that keeping a good relationship is more worthwhile than anything else. In accordance with this notion, Whetten and Cameron (2005) maintain that the accommodating style satisfies the other party’s concerns while neglecting one’s own. They conclude that the difficulty in habitual use of the accommodating style is that it emphasizes preserving a friendly relationship at the expense of critically appraising issues and protecting personal rights. In explaining the accommodating approach, Larson and Mildred (2000) indicate that this style involves a behaviour that is cooperative but not assertive and which may mean an unselfish and a long-term strategy to encourage others to cooperate or submit to the wishes of others. They describe those accommodators are usually favourably evaluated by others but are also perceived as weak and submissive. A principal who manages conflicts by accommodation, thereby satisfying the concerns of the other parties while neglecting his/her own concerns will make the other parties (teachers’) to be happy and comfortable in the school thereby building and upholding a positive school climate for teaching and learning in the school. This strategy makes staff to feel safe and secured in the school, having the support of their principal and to enjoy
working with each other. As a result, the climate of the school will be one that would be enjoyable by all staff and students, and it will be a positive climate, suitable for teaching and learning to take place.

Watkin and Hubbard (2003) define climate as a measure of employees perception of those aspects of the environment that directly impact on how well they can do their job; a measure of how it feels to work in a particular environment and for a particular boss. This means that conflict management by accommodation will make the staff of a school to perceive the environment as one that motivates them to do their job properly and giving them a feeling that they are working with just the perfect principal for them. This strategy of conflict management aligns with the Interest Based Relational Approach Theory of Roger Fisher and William Ury (1981), which states that in order to better manage conflicts, the manager must use certain rules which include; making sure that good relationships are the first priority, keeping people and problems separate, paying attention to the interests that are being presented, listening firsts and talking second, setting out the facts and exploring options together. When all these rules are followed, conflicts will be better managed and the school climate will remain a positive one for effective teaching and learning.

Conclusion

From the above discussions, all two alternative hypotheses (Ha) were retained. The decision was based on the results from the linear regression and ANOVA for linear regression which sought to establish the relationship as well as the strength of the relationship between the two variables under study. This implies that the general research hypothesis which states that “there is a significant relation between principals’ conflict management strategies and school climate holds for all the five modalities. The calculations from the linear regression analysis shows that the relationship between the two variables of the study is positive and the magnitude is high (strong relationship) since the correlation coefficient for all five modalities is higher than the p value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05. Hence, all the null hypotheses were rejected while all the alternative hypotheses were accepted.

Recommendations

Students especially at the level of student government in our secondary schools should learn to manage conflicts using the different conflict management strategies, having in mind that the strategy used to manage a conflict depend on the nature and the type of conflict.

Teachers should create suitable learning environments with a positive school climate for teaching and learning by making the students to be creative, to be producers of new knowledge and not consumers of knowledge thereby assuring good and cordial social environment. Above all he\'she should guide the students to be morally up to contribute their own quota for the nation building since the school is the microscopic (smaller unit) of a macro (larger unit) society and the teacher is the central pillar.

The principals should understand that the strategies used in management conflicts vary and depends on the type and nature of the conflict. Hence, there is no best conflict management strategy although according to this study, accommodation and collaboration strategies appear to be a better predictor’s positive school climate while the competition and avoidance are poor predictors of positive school climate.

Contributions of the Study to Knowledge

Based on the results of this study, the researcher proposes a model of conflict management and positive school climate which he titles “Cho Browndon’s proposed model of Conflict Management Strategies in Secondary Schools”. The model is presented in the figure below.
Figure 11: Cho Browndon’s Proposed Model of Conflict Management Strategies in Secondary School

REFERENCES

29. Tcho, T.M. (1987), Classroom Events, Methods, Techniques and Psychological Correlates.