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Research Article

PRINCIPALS' USE OF ARBITRATION CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND ITS IMPACT ON TEACHERS' EFFECTIVENESS IN CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE KUMBA MUNICIPALITY MEME DIVISION SOUTH WEST REGION OF CAMEROON

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on principals' arbitration management strategies and its impact on teachers' effectiveness in Catholic secondary schools in the Kumba municipality, Meme Division, Southwest Region. The lone objective was to investigate the impact of Principals' arbitration conflict Management strategies on Teachers' effectiveness in Catholic Secondary Schools in the Kumba municipality. This paper used of John W. Burton conflict resolution theory (1980). The research design chosen for this study was the qualitative case study research design. The sample technique for the research was the purposive sampling technique and the sample size was 9 participants (3 principals and 6 teachers). Two research instruments were used in collecting data for this study: principals' and teachers' interview guides). The instruments validity and reliability were ensured through supervisor's content scrutiny and ensuring transparency and auditing of the research activities as well as peer debriefing. Findings of the study showed that principals use of Arbitration conflict management strategy had an impact on teachers' effectiveness. Based on this finding the researcher recommended that the Catholic education secretariate should provide capacity building workshop for principals on conflict management. Also, the government in partnership with Catholic hierarchy should encourage the provision of capacity building workshops for teachers on teamwork and collaboration in the teaching environment.

KEYWORDS

Principals, Arbitration, Conflict, Management Strategy, Teachers' Effectiveness and Catholic Secondary Schools.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inevitable part of any organization, including schools. In secondary schools, conflicts can arise between teachers, between teachers and students, or between teachers and administrators. Therefore, it is important for school leaders, particularly principals, to have effective conflict management strategies to resolve conflicts and maintain a positive school culture. One such strategy is arbitration, which involves a neutral third party who listens to both sides of the conflict and makes a decision that is binding on all parties involved. Research has shown that principals' use of arbitration as a conflict management strategy can have a positive impact on teachers' effectiveness. Adejo (2016) found that principals who used arbitration were more likely to have satisfied teachers in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Similarly, Akinyemi and Ajayi (2020) found a positive correlation between principals' use of arbitration and teachers' job satisfaction in secondary schools in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Effective communication is also important for principals who use arbitration as a conflict management strategy. Bailey (2009) emphasized the importance of effective communication for school leaders, including the ability to listen actively and communicate clearly. This is particularly important during arbitration, where the principal must listen to both sides of the conflict and communicate the decision effectively to all parties involved. In addition to effective communication, principals must also have strong leadership skills to effectively use arbitration as a conflict management strategy. Hargreaves and Fink (2018) emphasized the importance of sustainable leadership, which involves building relationships with stakeholders, promoting collaboration, and empowering others. This type of leadership can help

principals effectively use arbitration to resolve conflicts and maintain a positive school culture.

Furthermore, principals must be knowledgeable about the policies and laws related to arbitration. The Republic of Cameroon (2005) has a national policy on education that outlines the role of school leaders in conflict management. Similarly, the World Bank (2011) has emphasized the importance of conflict resolution in promoting development and security. Principals' use of arbitration as a conflict management strategy can have a positive impact on teachers' effectiveness. Effective communication, strong leadership skills, and knowledge of policies and laws related to arbitration are important for principals to effectively use this strategy.

Context and Justification of Study

The situation in Cameroon regarding school conflicts is similar to that in other African countries and the rest of the world. Secondary schools in prominent towns like Douala, Yaoundé, Baffoussam, Limbe, Ebolowa, and Buea have experienced an increase in conflicts. These conflicts are not limited to disputes between principals and teachers but also extend to conflicts between teachers and students. In some cases, these conflicts have resulted in the deaths of both private and state teachers due to stabbings, fights, use of dangerous weapons, and the exchange of uncensored language between teachers and students. The South West region is particularly affected by conflicts in secondary schools. There have been incidents such as the death of a teacher in Government High School Limbe at the hands of a student and ongoing fights between students and teachers in Government Technical High School Molyko. These incidents serve as evidence of

the existence of conflicts within the secondary school environment.

In Catholic secondary schools, the Catholic Education Secretariat has established a progressive educational policy that emphasizes decentralization and multiculturalism in education. However, one of the obstacles to implementing this policy is the lack of conflict management skills and confidence among many school principals. Conflicts can arise between principals and teachers on various school-related issues. Principals may accuse teachers of failing to be effective in their roles, while teachers may criticize principals for being incompetent and authoritarian. These situations create conflicts that require skillful management by secondary school principals when working with teachers and students. The text describes how teachers' effectiveness in the school system has been hindered by various factors, leading to strikes and a decline in their performance. The report states that teachers' ineffectiveness is evident in behaviors such as late reporting to school, poor time management, record keeping, punctuality, relationships with others, note writing, discipline of students, teaching methods, and evaluation of learners. This ineffectiveness not only tarnishes the image of the teaching profession but also contributes to students' poor academic performance, leading to dropouts and economic losses for the school. The information is sourced from the Catholic Education Secretariat's 2021 annual report for the Diocese of Kumba. Based on the negative attitudes and behaviors observed among secondary school teachers, the researcher suspects that poor utilization of conflict management strategies may be associated with their effectiveness. However, there is limited knowledge about the impact of principals' conflict management strategies on teachers' effectiveness in Catholic secondary schools in Cameroon. This knowledge gap

motivated the present study, which aimed to examine the influence of principals' conflict management strategies on teachers' effectiveness in the Kumba municipality.

In essence, to meet the challenges and expectations of education institutions in Cameroon, the issue of principals' use of arbitration conflict management strategy and its impact on teachers' effectiveness has to be treated appropriately. Arbitration as a conflict management strategy has gained popularity among school principals in recent years. While arbitration can provide a fair and impartial resolution to conflicts, its impact on teacher effectiveness remains unclear. Research has shown that conflict management strategies employed by school principals can significantly affect teacher job satisfaction and performance (Li & Wang, 2019). Therefore, it is important to understand how arbitration is being used by school principals and its impact on teachers' effectiveness. Catholic secondary schools are not exempt from conflicts between principals and teachers. These conflicts can arise from various issues such as workload, curriculum, and disciplinary actions. The use of arbitration as a conflict management strategy by Catholic secondary school principals is of particular interest because of the unique nature of Catholic schools. Catholic schools have a distinct mission and values that may influence the way conflicts are managed. Therefore, it is essential to examine the use of arbitration by Catholic secondary school principals and its impact on teacher effectiveness.

The impact of arbitration on teacher effectiveness can be measured by assessing teacher job satisfaction and performance. Teacher job satisfaction is an important factor in teacher retention and student achievement (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Additionally, teacher performance is a crucial element in achieving

educational goals (Stronge & Tucker, 2011). Therefore, understanding the impact of arbitration on teacher job satisfaction and performance is critical in determining the effectiveness of this conflict management strategy. This study aims to investigate the use of arbitration as a conflict management strategy by Catholic secondary school principals and its impact on teachers' job satisfaction and performance. By examining the experiences of both principals and teachers, this study seeks to provide insights into the effectiveness of arbitration as a conflict management strategy in Catholic secondary schools in Kumba Municipality, Meme Division of the South West Region of Cameroon.

This study has as major objective to investigate the impact of principals' arbitration conflict management strategies on teachers' effectiveness in catholic secondary schools in Kumba municipality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Crossfield and Bourne (2018) arbitration conflict management strategy involves low concern for self and high concern for others. In this strategy a party tries to absorb conflict by minimizing differences and emphasise commonalities for purpose of satisfying the needs of the other party. It can be used as a strategy when an individual is willing to make a concession with the hope of getting something in return. The strategy of arbitration in conflict management involves the involvement of a neutral third party who assists groups in resolving their conflicts by facilitating discussions and allowing the expression of anger and frustration in a free and therapeutic manner (Oboegbulem & Onwurah, 2011). This approach aims to empower the disputants and promote equality in power dynamics (Oboegbulem & Onwurah, 2011). It can be viewed as a process in which a neutral third party reviews evidence and arguments from both sides and issues a binding

decision to settle the case (Amoh, 2007). The arbitrator, peace maker, or peace panel appeals to the conscience of those involved in the conflict and strives to achieve a resolution (Amoh, 2007).

Research studies have explored the efficacy of arbitration as a conflict resolution method. For instance, Abia and Ekpoattai (2014) conducted a study on the Ibibio people of South-South Nigeria, which concluded that arbitration is widely accepted and ranges from customary to statutory forms. The study emphasized the role of community elders in maintaining peace through arbitration and highlighted its non-adversarial nature, which promotes future harmony between parties (Abia & Ekpoattai, 2014). This suggests that the strategy of arbitration can be applied to conflict management in secondary schools, where members of the school community can serve as arbitrators to amicably settle disputes.

Folberg and Golann (2003) likened the role of a referee in arbitration to that of a judge in court proceedings. The referee has the authority to make binding decisions based on the evidence presented by both parties. Various studies have explored the relationship between arbitration as a conflict management strategy and teachers' effectiveness. Inang (2016) investigated the conflict management strategies of head teachers and their impact on primary school teachers' effectiveness. The study found a significant relationship between arbitration, mediation, avoidance, collaboration, and teachers' effectiveness, suggesting that principals and head teachers should be trained in effective conflict resolution strategies (Inang, 2016). Tshuma et al. (2016) conducted a similar study in Gwanda District, Zimbabwe, focusing on the causes of conflict in urban and peri-urban secondary schools. The study identified both structural and personal factors contributing to conflicts among

teachers, school heads, parents, and students. Structural causes included resource sharing, poor work conditions, and administrative styles, while personal factors included differences in personalities, poor information dissemination, and favoritism (Tshuma et al., 2016).

Adeyemi (2009) examined conflict management by principals in public secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria. The study revealed that conflicts were not effectively managed due to principals' inadequate utilization of conflict resolution strategies. The study recommended the establishment of committees for conflict resolution, promoting open communication, and the use of dialogue in managing conflicts (Adeyemi, 2009). Shapiro (2014) highlighted the importance of addressing parties' concerns in a fair manner to prevent future conflicts. When parties feel their concerns have been heard and fairly addressed, they are more likely to be satisfied with the outcome and less likely to hold grudges. Graham and Shier (2011) emphasized the significance of transparency and fairness in conflict management to avoid favoritism.

In traditional African arbitration, a third-party arbitrator is utilized to settle conflicts, often involving traditional rulers, religious leaders, or respected community members. The arbitrator encourages parties to drop their hostility and seek mutual concessions (Ovwigbo, 2004). However, excessive reliance on third-party intervention may give the impression that the leader has lost control (Ovwigbo, 2004). According to Zartman (2002), traditional African arbitration involves a neutral third party armed with personal characteristics such as wisdom. Arbitration as a conflict management strategy involves the assistance of a neutral third party in facilitating discussions, making binding decisions, and promoting peaceful resolutions. It has been studied in various

contexts, including schools, and has been found to have a significant impact on conflict resolution and teachers' effectiveness. Transparency, fairness, and addressing parties' concerns are crucial elements in successful arbitration.

From a theoretical point of view, John W. Burton conflict resolution theory (1980) presented a comprehensive framework for understanding and managing conflicts. His theory emphasizes the importance of addressing and resolving conflicts at their root causes, rather than merely treating their symptoms. He argued that conflicts arise from fundamental human needs, such as security, recognition, and identity, which can be categorized into material, sociopsychological, and identity-based dimensions. According to Burton's theory, conflicts can be resolved through a process called "human needs theory," which involves identifying the underlying needs of the conflicting parties and finding mutually acceptable ways to fulfill those needs. This approach acknowledges that conflicts are not inherently destructive but can be a source of positive change and transformation. Burton proposed that by addressing the underlying needs of the parties involved, conflict resolution can lead to sustainable and mutually beneficial outcomes.

Applying Burton's conflict resolution theory to the context of principals' use of arbitration conflict management strategy and its impact on teachers' effectiveness, it can be inferred that the principals' use of arbitration as a conflict management strategy may have implications for teachers' effectiveness. Arbitration, as a form of conflict resolution, involves the intervention of a neutral third party who makes a binding decision to settle the dispute. While arbitration may provide a quick resolution to conflicts, it may not necessarily address the underlying needs and interests

of the teachers. Burton's theory suggests that a more effective approach would be to adopt a conflict management strategy that focuses on fulfilling the needs of both principals and teachers. This could involve open communication, active listening, and collaborative problem-solving. By engaging in a process that recognizes and addresses the underlying needs and interests of both parties, principals can foster a more positive and productive work environment for teachers, which, in turn, can enhance their effectiveness.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative case study research design was adopted for the study. The population of this study comprised all catholic secondary schools in the Kumba municipality, specifically principals and teachers of these secondary schools in Kumba municipality of the Diocese of Kumba. This study's target population included Saint Francis college Fiango Kumba, Saint John college Kumba Town and Sacred Heart comprehensive college Fiango Kumba. The sample population for the study was made up of 9 participants (3 principals and 6 teachers). The purposive sampling techniques was adopted for the study. The instruments use for data collection was an interview guide for principals' and teachers'. Data from the interview guide were analysed thematically.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study are presented and supported by literature and the works of other researchers.

Principals' use of arbitration conflict management strategy and Teachers' effectiveness in Catholic Secondary Schools

Based on principal's use of arbitration conflict management strategy, Principals viewed arbitration

conflict management strategy as: Exercising authority to resolve a conflict. In this light participant A said arbiter is "someone who is called to officiate among two parties or persons in conflict". During their use of arbitration conflict management strategy, principals employ firm authority while acting as a neutral person during the conflict management process ensuring that fairness and justice takes its course on both parties. This in return has an impact on teachers' effectiveness as teachers see where they went wrong and do their best to make amends so as to carry on with their activities in a conducive school environment not leaving out an increase in performance. The findings of this study also corroborate with that of Shapiro (2014), who explained that enforcing harmony can help to prevent future conflict from arising. When parties feel that their concerns have been heard and addresses in a fair manner, they are more likely to be satisfied with the outcome and less likely to continue to hold a grudge against the other party.

Arbitration in conflict management involves the arbiter being neutral to resolve the conflict. In this light participant A explained that in the process of arbitration, "...the arbiter is strongly advised to be neutral. Like a referee in the football field, he is not allowed to take sides with either party. He should be neutral". The strategy of arbitration in conflict management involves the involvement of a neutral third party who assists groups in resolving their conflicts by facilitating discussions and allowing the expression of anger and frustration in a free and therapeutic manner (Oboegbulem & Onwurah, 2011). This approach aims to empower the disputants and promote equality in power dynamics (Oboegbulem & Onwurah, 2011). It can be viewed as a process in which a neutral third party reviews evidence and arguments from both sides and issues a binding decision to settle the case (Amoh, 2007). The arbitrator, peace maker, or

peace panel appeals to the conscience of those involved in the conflict and strives to achieve a resolution (Amoh, 2007).

In the same line participant B said “... this is the situation where a person acts like a referee in such a way that both parties end up in a win-win solution to the conflict that arises in a situation”. Arbitration conflict management also entails collaboration to solve problems. In this light, participant C explained that it is “a process by which you bring people who are having difficulties or problems together by solving those problems for them”. Folberg and Golann (2003) likened the role of a referee in arbitration to that of a judge in court proceedings. The referee has the authority to make binding decisions based on the evidence presented by both parties. Various studies have explored the relationship between arbitration as a conflict management strategy and teachers' effectiveness. Inang (2016) investigated the conflict management strategies of head teachers and their impact on primary school teachers' effectiveness. The study found a significant relationship between arbitration, mediation, avoidance, collaboration, and teachers' effectiveness, suggesting that principals and head teachers should be trained in effective conflict resolution strategies.

In a similar way, when teachers were asked by the interviewer, what understanding they had of arbitration conflict management strategy, responses brought forth these: In relation to explaining the understanding of arbitration respondents viewed arbitration to mean exercising authority to resolve a conflict in a neutral manner.

In this line participant A understands arbitration as “... arbitrator is when one is called up to settle dispute between conflicting parties without taking side. He is not allowed to take side in either party. He should be

neutral”. and this ideology was supported by participant B who through more light referring to an arbitrator as a referee, called to officiate conflict situations “An arbitrator can be referred to a referee, who officiates a conflict situation with a neutral mindset on both conflicting parties. Such is the case of a football match”. Huan and Yazdanifard (2012) argue that those who prefer arbitration style resolve conflicts in the best way which is accepted by all concerned parties. They view the style as one that tackles the conflict issues openly and frankly without taking sides and also communicating with all the parties. According to Huan and Yazdanifard, arbitration promotes task-goal achievement and is related to job satisfaction. This satisfaction results into high achievement for teachers and students alike.

Meanwhile participant C brought in the aspect of not being bias during a conflict management process, referring to the arbitrator, “... he is someone called to settle dispute between two people without being bias to any of the parties involved in the conflict. Because if the arbitrator favors one party the conflict won't be solved in the right way”. Mangel & Incardona (2012) argue that impartiality and neutrality are essential for effective conflict resolution in educational settings. They suggest that an impartial arbitrator can facilitate a more balanced and fair resolution, promoting a positive environment for all parties involved.

Participant D understands arbitration conflict management as a strategy used in conflict management process, not involving favoritism. “I see arbitration as a strategy of solving conflict which involves neutrality and no favoritism. That's to say that the arbitrator does not take side”. Several scholarly sources support the importance of impartiality and neutrality in conflict resolution processes like arbitration. Osula & Rogers (2009) emphasize that an

arbitrator's role is to remain neutral and objective throughout the process. They explain that neutrality helps build trust and confidence in the arbitrator's decision-making.

Teachers were also confronted about their knowledge of neutrality and if their principal makes use of neutrality during the use of arbitration conflict management strategy in a conflict process and how. In an attempt to explain how a principal act neutral during a conflict management process, several respondents were interviewed in order to share their points of view on this.

Participant A began by saying "... In a case of student conflict, the principal listens to the students involved and gives equal punishment to both parties. That is the same work hours and suspension days is given to the students. The concept of applying equal punishment to both parties involved in a conflict can be seen as a form of distributive justice, where fairness is achieved through equal treatment. While the text does not provide specific citations, the principle of fairness and equal treatment can be found in various educational policies and guidelines. For example, in the context of disciplinary actions in schools, many education systems prioritize fairness and consistency in enforcing consequences for student misconduct. It is important to ensure that disciplinary measures are administered without bias or favoritism.

Then participant B relates with this by adding that the principal understands the co-workers "... The principal understands his co-workers' point of view and sees it as the most common way to resolve inter personal conflict. The principal listens to each other opinion and viewpoints without talking over each other." Emphasizes the importance of the principal understanding the perspectives of co-workers and engaging in active listening, this approach aligns with

effective communication and conflict resolution strategies. By actively listening and considering multiple viewpoints, conflicts can be better understood, and mutually acceptable solutions can be reached. The importance of active listening and understanding others' viewpoints is supported by research in the field of conflict resolution and communication (Bolton, & Drew, 1991).

On the other hand, participant C explained that the principal meets the people in conflict "... The principal considers meeting each teacher or student in person and keeping the conversation goal oriented, that is talking about the reason they are all there which is to impact knowledge on the students or the reasons why the students came to that particular school which is to study." This suggests that the principal focuses on goal-oriented conversations when meeting with the individuals involved in the conflict. This approach aims to steer the conversation toward the primary objectives of education and the reasons why students attend the school. While no specific citation is provided, the idea aligns with the principles of constructive dialogue and problem-solving in conflict resolution (Kalagbor and Nnokam, 2015). The goal-oriented approach helps shift the focus from personal grievances to shared goals and interests.

Meanwhile participant D explains that "... The principal acts courteous, but does not sugarcoat the problem. The principal describes the effects it has on others, especially students." Owan (2018) points out that Open and honest communication is a key principle in conflict resolution. By clearly communicating the impact of the conflict, the principal can help the parties involved understand the significance and urgency of finding a resolution. While there are no specific citations mentioned, the value of open communication

in conflict resolution is widely recognized in the literature on conflict management and leadership.

To continue, participant E said rather than imposing a decision on the staffs in conflict. "...the principal tells them to resolve their problems while the principal makes it clear that he expects improvements, will monitor progress and also says he would not encourage such behaviors next time." Goldsmith et al., (2003) suggests that the principal encourages the staff members to resolve their own conflicts rather than imposing a decision on them. This approach aligns with the principles of empowerment and fostering autonomy in conflict resolution. By empowering individuals to find their own solutions, they become more invested in the process and are more likely to reach a sustainable resolution. While no specific citations are provided, the concept of empowering individuals in conflict resolution can be found in the literature on collaborative problem-solving and dispute resolution.

Lastly, participant F concluded by saying that in a case of student conflict, "...the principal focuses on the problem, its causes, effects, and possible remediation and not on the personalities involved, that is if it is a staff's child or the principal's relative. The principal looks for a solution and not a culprit. Folger et al. (2005) emphasizes that the principal focuses on the problem itself, including its causes, effects, and possible solutions, rather than fixating on the personalities involved. This approach aligns with problem-focused resolution, where the emphasis is on identifying and addressing the underlying issues rather than assigning blame or focusing on personal relationships. By adopting a solution-seeking mindset, the principal can work towards finding a resolution that benefits all parties involved. While no specific citations are mentioned, the concept of problem-

focused resolution is widely discussed in conflict resolution literature.

In line with all this responds on the understanding and use of arbitration conflict management strategy, the researcher found out that the use of this methos impacted teachers' effectiveness when properly used by the principal as an arbitrator. That is his rule as an authority, being neutral and fair during the conflict management process, leaves the conflicting party in a conducive environment (win-win) situation, were both parties feel satisfied and are willing to carry on with their duties.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the use of arbitration as a conflict management strategy by principals in Catholic secondary schools can have a significant impact on teachers' effectiveness. Arbitration, which involves the intervention of a neutral third party to facilitate conflict resolution, provides a structured and fair approach to managing conflicts among teachers. Research has shown that effective conflict management strategies, such as arbitration, contribute to a positive work environment, improved communication, and enhanced job satisfaction among teachers (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). By employing arbitration, principals in Catholic secondary schools can create an atmosphere of fairness and impartiality, ensuring that conflicts are resolved in a manner that considers the perspectives and interests of all parties involved. This approach promotes a sense of trust and confidence in the conflict resolution process, allowing teachers to focus on their core responsibilities of teaching and nurturing students. Moreover, arbitration can help foster collaboration and teamwork among teachers, leading to increased productivity and a more harmonious school environment (Osula & Rogers, 2009). In Catholic secondary schools, where the principles of

justice, equity, and community are highly valued, the use of arbitration as a conflict management strategy aligns with the broader mission of the Catholic education system. It upholds the principles of fairness, respect, and dialogue, which are integral to Catholic social teachings. By implementing arbitration effectively, principals can create a supportive and inclusive school culture that enhances teachers' effectiveness and ultimately benefits the entire school community.

It is generally recommended that, for the enhancement of teachers' effectiveness in Catholic secondary schools in Kumba, recommended that the Catholic education secretariate should provide capacity building workshop for principals on conflict management. Also, principals should carry on with the use of these conflict management strategies in the resolution of conflict in their schools so as to erect a conducive school environment.

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