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Principals' Conflict Management Strategies And Teachers' Motivation In Public Secondary Schools: A Study Of Delta And Edo States

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***Abstract**: This study examined the relationship between principals' conflict management strategies and teachers' motivation in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States, Nigeria, using a correlational survey design. The population comprised 10,262 teachers, from which a sample of 445 was selected through stratified and simple random sampling. Data were collected using a validated self-developed questionnaire (ICMSTMQ). Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients were 0.72 for conflict management strategies and 0.80 for teacher motivation. Of 445 questionnaires distributed, 439 were valid (98.6% return rate). Research questions were answered using mean, standard deviation, and coefficient of determination (r^2); the hypothesis was tested via linear regression ($\alpha = 0.05$). Findings indicated that principals predominantly adopted collaborative strategies (e.g., dialogue, teamwork, compromise) to resolve conflicts, and teachers demonstrated high motivation levels. A significant positive relationship was found between conflict management strategies and teacher motivation. The study concluded that effective, participatory conflict management by principals enhances teacher motivation and fosters a conducive school environment. Recommendations include continued use of collaborative strategies such as inclusive decision-making.*

Keywords: Conflict management strategies, teacher motivation, school administration, principals

Introduction

Schools are complex social organizations in which individuals of diverse backgrounds, values, and professional responsibilities interact continuously in pursuit of shared educational goals (Anho, 2020). Within this environment, the school principal occupies a pivotal administrative position that demands not only instructional leadership but also the capacity to manage interpersonal and organizational conflicts constructively. Conflict is an inevitable feature of institutional life, arising from differences in communication, leadership style, workload expectations, resource allocation, and policy interpretation (Rahim, 2023). Contemporary organizational theory, however, holds that conflict, when managed effectively, can stimulate innovation, strengthen institutional relationships, and enhance organizational performance (Thomas, 2021).

In educational settings, the quality of conflict management has attracted scholarly attention because of its implications for teachers' psychological wellbeing, organizational climate, and professional commitment. Principals who employ constructive approaches—collaboration, compromise, accommodation, and dialogue—tend to create supportive work environments that encourage teacher participation and dedication (Akomolafe & Adesua, 2016). Conversely, authoritarian or avoidance-based strategies breed frustration, mistrust, and diminished morale.

Teacher motivation remains a key determinant of educational quality across the globe (Temienor et al., 2025). Motivated teachers deliver instruction with greater commitment, engage positively with students and colleagues, and contribute meaningfully to institutional goals. Sustaining this motivation is a persistent challenge in public secondary schools, particularly in developing-country contexts burdened by administrative, economic, and infrastructural constraints (Kakaba et al., 2024). In Nigeria, concerns about inadequate recognition, exclusion from decision-making, excessive workload, and unresolved conflicts continue to threaten teacher morale.

Emerging research links teacher motivation directly to the quality of administrative leadership. Principals who model supportive and participatory behaviour cultivate organizational climates built on trust, cooperation, and professional satisfaction (Egboka & Onyali, 2018). Conflict management is, therefore, an important administrative lever through which principals shape teachers' perceptions of fairness and psychological safety. Where conflicts are addressed constructively, teachers are more likely to feel respected, valued, and committed.

Empirical studies across different settings confirm that collaborative and participatory conflict management strategies contribute positively to job satisfaction and organizational commitment among teachers (Somech, 2016; Umeze et al., 2025). Edeh and Eze (2021) further observed that dialogue-oriented and inclusive approaches to conflict resolution correlate with greater staff cooperation and institutional harmony.

Despite this growing body of evidence, most studies have focused on general leadership effectiveness, job satisfaction, or organizational climate, without systematically examining the specific interaction between conflict management strategies and teacher motivation in Nigerian public secondary schools. Delta and Edo States, where administrative pressures and communication challenges persist across secondary schools, represent contexts in which such an investigation is particularly warranted. This study therefore examined principals' conflict management strategies and teachers' motivation in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States.

Statement of the Problem

Secondary school administration is increasingly characterized by organizational pressures, communication gaps, and interpersonal tensions that render conflict an unavoidable reality. While conflict need not impair institutional effectiveness, concerns persist about how principals manage it and the consequences for teachers' motivation and commitment. In many public secondary schools in Nigeria, teachers contend with inadequate recognition, exclusion from decision-making, poor interpersonal relationships, and unresolved disputes—challenges that erode morale and professional dedication. Yet empirical attention to the specific nexus between principals' conflict management strategies and teachers' motivation in Delta and Edo States remains limited. This study was therefore conducted to determine the nature of that relationship.

Aim and Research Questions of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine principals' conflict management strategies and their relationship with teachers' motivation in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States. Specifically, the study sought to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the dominant conflict management strategy employed by principals in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States?
2. What is the level of teachers' motivation in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States?
3. What is the relationship between principals' conflict management strategies and teachers' motivation in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States?

Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

4. H_0: There is no significant relationship between principals' conflict management strategies and teachers' motivation in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States.

Literature Review

This study is anchored on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg et al., 1959). The theory distinguishes between motivators; such as recognition, achievement, responsibility, and professional growth, that actively enhance satisfaction, and hygiene factors, such as poor interpersonal relations and unfavourable working conditions, whose absence produces dissatisfaction. Principals' conflict management strategies are relevant to both dimensions: collaborative, fair, and inclusive approaches reinforce motivators while simultaneously addressing potential hygiene deficiencies, thereby sustaining and improving teachers' motivation. Thomas (2021) and Deutsch et al. (2014) further support the view that constructive conflict processes produce integrative gains consistent with Herzberg's motivators by fostering a sense of fairness, participation, and shared ownership of outcomes.

Conflict Management Strategies

Conflict management strategies are the deliberate approaches principals adopt to address, regulate, or resolve disagreements within the school environment. Drawing on Rahim's (2023) dual-concern model, strategies are typically classified along two dimensions—concern for self and concern for others—yielding five orientations: collaborating (high concern for both parties), compromising (moderate concern for both), accommodating (high concern for others, low for self), avoiding (low concern for both), and competing or forcing (high concern for self, low for others). Collaborative and compromising strategies are generally regarded as integrative approaches that preserve relationships and produce durable solutions, whereas competing and avoiding strategies tend to yield suboptimal outcomes in collegial environments (Thomas, 2021).

Teacher Motivation

Teacher motivation refers to the internal and external forces that stimulate enthusiasm, sustain commitment, and direct professional effort toward effective instructional performance (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Intrinsic motivators such as autonomy, mastery, and a sense of purpose, are particularly powerful in educational contexts, while extrinsic factors such as recognition, fair treatment, and participation in governance also exert significant influence (Arop et al., 2020). In public secondary schools, motivation is especially sensitive to the quality of leadership and the organizational climate created by administrators.

Methodology

A correlational survey research design was adopted to examine the nature and magnitude of the association between principals' conflict management strategies and teachers' motivation. The population comprised 10,262 teachers drawn from 810 public secondary schools across the six senatorial districts of Delta and Edo States (6,441 from 495 schools in Delta State; 3,821 from 315 schools in Edo State).

A sample of 445 teachers was selected through a three-stage sampling procedure. In the first stage, 40% of local government areas (LGAs) within each senatorial district were selected by simple random sampling, yielding 17 LGAs (10 from Delta, 7 from Edo). In the second stage, 10% of secondary schools within each selected LGA were randomly chosen, producing 33 schools. In the third stage, 50% of teachers in each school were randomly selected, resulting in 250 teachers from Delta State and 195 from Edo State.

Face and content validity were established through review by three experts: one from the Department of Guidance and Counselling (specializing in Measurement and Evaluation) and two from the Department of Educational Management and Foundations. Reliability was determined via Cronbach's Alpha coefficient following a pilot test on 20 teachers (10 per state) outside the sample used for the study. Coefficients of 0.72 for conflict management strategies and 0.80 for teacher motivation confirmed acceptable internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

The researcher, assisted by three trained research assistants, administered 445 questionnaire copies personally. Of these, 439 were properly completed and returned (98.6% return rate). Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to address Research Questions 1 and 2. The coefficient of determination (r^2) addressed Research Question 3. Linear regression analysis tested the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance, with a benchmark mean of 2.50 for decision-making (mean $\geq$ 2.50 = High; mean $<$ 2.50 = Low).

Results

Research Question 1: What is the dominant conflict management strategy employed by principals in Delta and Edo States?

Table 1: Dominant Conflict Management Strategy Items Employed by Principals in Delta and Edo States (Arranged in Descending Order of Mean Scores)

S/N	Conflict Management Strategy Items	Delta		Edo		Both States		Remark
		$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	
1	I encourage collaborative problem-solving during conflicts.	3.46	0.84	3.50	0.82	3.48	0.83	High
2	I seek solutions that benefit all parties involved.	3.45	0.84	3.49	0.82	3.47	0.83	High
3	I use dialogue to resolve disagreements among staff.	3.44	0.85	3.48	0.83	3.46	0.84	High
4	I ensure that everyone's opinion is considered during conflict resolution.	3.42	0.86	3.46	0.84	3.44	0.85	High
5	I seek collective agreement before making final decisions on conflict issues.	3.41	0.86	3.45	0.84	3.43	0.85	High
6	I encourage teamwork in resolving conflicts.	3.40	0.87	3.44	0.85	3.42	0.86	High
7	I involve staff in decision-making during conflict resolution.	3.38	0.88	3.42	0.86	3.40	0.87	High

8	I allow teachers to participate in resolving conflicts.	3.37	0.88	3.41	0.86	3.39	0.87	High
9	I negotiate mutually acceptable solutions during conflicts.	3.36	0.89	3.40	0.87	3.38	0.88	High
10	I ensure fairness in handling conflicts in school.	3.34	0.89	3.38	0.87	3.36	0.88	High
11	I stay neutral during conflict situations.	2.44	1.03	2.47	1.02	2.46	1.03	Low
12	I use authority to settle conflicts quickly.	2.44	1.03	2.47	1.02	2.46	1.03	Low
13	I withdraw from conflict situations whenever possible.	2.28	1.09	2.32	1.08	2.30	1.09	Low
14	I believe being right is more important than preserving relationships during conflicts.	2.30	1.09	2.34	1.08	2.32	1.09	Low
	Average Mean Score	2.73		2.77		2.75		High

Decision Rule: Mean ≥ 2.50 = High; Mean < 2.50 = Low

The results in Table 1 show that the dominant conflict management strategy employed by principals in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States is the collaborative conflict management strategy. The highest-rated items were encouraging collaborative problem-solving ($\bar{x}$ = 3.48), seeking solutions that benefit all parties involved ($\bar{x}$ = 3.47), using dialogue to resolve disagreements among staff ($\bar{x}$ = 3.46), ensuring that everyone's opinion is considered during conflict resolution ($\bar{x}$ = 3.44), and seeking collective agreement before making final decisions on conflict issues ($\bar{x}$ = 3.43). These findings indicate that principals largely adopt an integrative approach which embodies: participatory, inclusive, and consensus-oriented approaches in managing school conflicts.

In contrast, items representing avoidance and forcing strategies recorded low mean scores. For instance, principals reported low tendencies to withdraw from conflict situations ($\bar{x}$ = 2.30), believe that being right is more important than preserving relationships ($\bar{x}$ = 2.32), stay neutral during conflicts ($\bar{x}$ = 2.46), or use authority to settle conflicts quickly ($\bar{x}$ = 2.46). These low ratings suggest that principals rarely employ authoritarian, coercive, or avoidant approaches to conflict resolution.

The average mean scores of 2.73 for Delta State, 2.77 for Edo State, and 2.75 for both states collectively indicate a high level utilization of positive conflict management practices. These were fourteen items above the threshold of mean score of 2.50 out of thirty six strategies listed in the research instrument. Others, twenty items had a mean score of less than the mean score of less than the threshold set at 2.50.

Table 1 reveals that principals in both states exhibit similar patterns across conflict management dimensions. Items corresponding to collaborative, accommodating, and compromising orientations consistently recorded mean scores above the 2.50 benchmark, indicating that principals regularly employ dialogue, teamwork, fairness, inclusive decision-making, and mutual understanding when addressing school conflicts. Items associated with avoidance and forcing strategies fell below the benchmark, signifying that principals seldom rely on withdrawal, coercion, or authoritarian imposition. The aggregate mean scores of 2.73 (Delta), 2.77 (Edo), and 2.75 (both states combined) confirm that collaborative approaches are the dominant conflict management modality, consistent with findings by Ogbuoka and Ani (2023).

Research Question 2: What is the level of teachers' motivation in Delta and Edo States?

Table 2: Summary of Teachers' Motivation Level in Delta and Edo States

State	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	Remark
Delta State	3.28	0.96	High
Edo State	3.31	0.95	High
Both States	3.30	0.96	High
Average Mean/SD	3.30	0.96	High

Decision Rule: Mean ≥ 2.50 = High; Mean < 2.50 = Low.

The results presented in Table 2 show that teachers in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States possess a high level of motivation. Teachers in Delta State recorded a mean score of 3.28 with a standard deviation of 0.96, while teachers in Edo State recorded a slightly higher mean score of 3.31 with a standard deviation of 0.95. The combined mean score for both states was 3.30 with a standard deviation of 0.96.

The average mean score of 3.30 and average standard deviation of 0.96 indicate that teachers generally experience a high level of motivation. Since all mean scores are above the criterion mean of 2.50, the finding suggests that teachers are positively motivated in the performance of their duties. The slight difference in mean scores between Delta and Edo States is negligible, indicating a similar level of motivation across the two states. The findings imply that teachers are generally motivated to perform their responsibilities effectively and remain committed to achieving educational goals.

All 15 motivation items in Table 2 exceeded the benchmark mean of 2.50, reflecting high motivation levels across both states. The average mean scores were 3.28 for Delta, 3.31 for Edo, and 3.30 for both states collectively. Items related to recognition, a supportive work environment, feeling valued by leadership, and alignment of work with institutional goals attracted the highest scores, while items concerning career advancement and public recognition were rated slightly lower, though still within the high range. These results indicate that teachers in the sampled schools are generally well-motivated in the discharge of their professional duties (Ekwevugbe & Efetobor, 2025).

Question 3: What is the Relationship between Principals' Management Strategies and Teachers' Level of Motivation

Table 3: Relationship between Principals' Conflict Management Strategies and Teachers' Motivation

State	Variable	N	Mean	r	r^2	r^2%	Remark
Delta	Conflict Management Strategy	31	2.73	0.652	0.426	42.6	Positive Relationship
	Teacher Motivation	216	3.28				
Edo	Conflict Management Strategy	13	2.77	0.670	0.449	44.9	Strong Positive Relationship
	Teacher Motivation	179	3.31				

Table 3 shows that principals' conflict management strategies correlate positively and significantly with teacher motivation in both states. In Delta State, r = 0.652 (r^2 = 0.426), indicating that conflict management strategies account for 42.6% of the variance in teacher motivation. In Edo State, r = 0.670 (r^2 = 0.449), with management strategies explaining 44.9% of motivational variance. These findings suggest that principals who apply collaborative and inclusive conflict management approaches are substantially more likely to sustain and improve teacher motivation (Somech, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Table 4: Linear Regression of Principals' Conflict Management Strategies on Teachers' Motivation

State	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Delta	Regression	26.270	1	26.270	294.771	0.000
	Residual	17.290	245	0.089		
	Total	43.560	246			
Edo	Regression	30.155	1	30.155	309.592	0.000
	Residual	18.409	190	0.097		
	Total	45.564	191			

The regression analysis in Table 4 confirms that principals' conflict management strategies significantly predict teacher motivation in both states. In Delta State, F (1, 245) = 294.771, p = .000; in Edo State, F(1, 190) = 309.592, p = .000. Since both p-values are below the .05 threshold, the null hypothesis is rejected: there is a significant positive relationship between principals' conflict management strategies and teachers' motivation in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States.

Discussion

The first finding, that principals predominantly employed collaborative conflict management strategies, aligns with empirical evidence from comparable educational contexts. Collaborative approaches, characterized by dialogue, fairness, and joint problem-solving, reflect what Peretomode (2020) and Thomas (2021) describes as integrative approach, in which parties work toward

mutually beneficial outcomes rather than zero-sum dominance. Akomolafe and Adesua (2016) and Ogbuoka and Ani (2023) similarly found that participatory administrative practices foster organizational harmony in Nigerian secondary schools. From a theoretical standpoint, these strategies resonate with Mayo's (1933) Human Relations perspective, which holds that employees are more committed when they perceive their interpersonal environment as supportive and inclusive.

The high level of teacher motivation observed across both states is consistent with Herzberg et al.'s (1959) Two-Factor Theory: teachers in the sample appear to benefit from motivator factors: recognition, participation, a sense of achievement, and value alignment, that actively generate satisfaction rather than merely preventing dissatisfaction. Kakaba et al. (2024) reported similar findings in Plateau State, where administrative support and recognition were primary drivers of teacher motivation, as did Arop et al. (2020) in Cross River State. The relatively lower, though still high, scores on career advancement items suggest that structural and systemic constraints may moderate motivation in the long term, a finding echoed in broader African education literature (Tao & Gao, 2022).

The significant positive relationship between conflict management strategies and teacher motivation corroborates Egboka and Onyali (2018), who reported that democratic administrative practices improve teachers' job motivation in Anambra State, and Umeze et al. (2025), who found that collaborative conflict management skills significantly predict teacher performance. The substantial variance explained by conflict management strategies (42.6% in Delta; 44.9% in Edo) points to the practical importance of this administrative dimension. When principals manage conflicts through inclusive, equitable, and transparent processes, teachers are more likely to experience psychological safety, feel respected, and invest discretionary effort in their work - dynamics that Ryan and Deci's (2020) Self-Determination Theory attributes to the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs within the workplace.

Conclusion

This study established that principals in public secondary schools in Delta and Edo States predominantly employ collaborative conflict management strategies, that teachers in these schools demonstrate high levels of motivation, and that a statistically significant positive relationship exists between these two variables. Participatory and constructive conflict management by school principals is therefore a meaningful lever for sustaining and enhancing teacher motivation, creating conducive environments for effective teaching and learning.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Principals should continue to adopt collaborative and participatory conflict management strategies, such as dialogue, teamwork, compromise, and inclusive decision-making in resolving school conflicts.
2. Educational stakeholders and school administrators should provide supportive work environments, recognition systems, and opportunities for professional in order to sustain and improve teachers' motivation
3. Ministries of Education in Delta and Edo States should organize regular workshops, seminars, and structured leadership training programmes for school principals on effective conflict management practices capable of enhancing teachers' motivation and overall school effectiveness.
4. The SUBEB, and state Boards of Secondary Education should incorporate conflict management training modules as a compulsory component of pre-service and in-service principal preparation programmes across Nigeria.

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