
Principals' Conflict Management Skills as Predictors of Teachers' Job Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

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Abstract

The study examined principals' conflict management skills as predictors of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study was a correlational research design. The population of the study was 267 principals in the 267 public secondary schools from the six Education Zones in Anambra State. The entire population of 267 principals was used for the study. Census sampling technique was used for the study because the population was small and manageable by the researcher. Two researcher-structured instruments were used for data collection: Conflict Management Skills Questionnaire (CMSQ) and Teachers' Job Performance Questionnaire (TJPQ). The instruments were subjected to face and construct validation. Face validation was done by three experts, while construct validation was carried out by Principal Component Analysis (PCA) approach. The reliability of the instrument was done using Cronbach Alpha method and the average coefficient values 0.82 for CMSQ and 0.85 for TJPQ were obtained and considered highly reliable and suitable for the study. Simple linear regression statistical tool was used to answer the research questions and test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study concluded that principals' conflict management skills are positive and significant predictors of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Based on the findings, the study recommended among others that the school principals should develop the habit of being a good and active listener in order to build trust, reduce misunderstanding and improve their relationships with their staff in schools for improved teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Keywords: Principals' conflict management skills, teachers' job performance, public secondary school

Introduction

Teachers promote quality education from the domain of teaching and learning through creative ideas, participation and cooperative learning, research, analysis and critical thinking, problem solving, innovation and encouragement of creative and divergent thinking. Onyekwelu and Adinna (2022) noted that teachers' activities in the area of teaching and learning lead to proper development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values that enable students to function effectively and live as responsible citizens and also make useful contribution to the society. Therefore, teachers' job performance play a crucial role in the students' learning processes.

Teachers' job performance acts as an avenue for monitoring and evaluation. Teachers' performance assessment is done to make decisions for permanency or promotion of teachers. It is the collection of information about the strengths and weaknesses of teachers so as to improve their capacity and the conditions of education. Chikendu (2023) noted that teachers' job performance can be in terms of attendance, time management, acceptance of responsibility, teacher preparations and harmonious relations at school. This conceptualization agreed with Ejiofor (2022), Azubuike (2024) that teachers' job performance could be measured in terms of planning and preparation, classroom management and instruction. Onyekwelu (2024) asserted that teachers' job performance is understood as teachers' effectiveness in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities to enhance educational outcomes. Chukwueze (2023), Adinna & Okafor (2023) also noted teachers' job performance as changes in teachers' practice, example, knowledge, understanding, skills, behaviour, attitudes, values, and convictions.

In the educational setting, job performance comprises what a teacher does in the school for achievement of school goals and the outcomes of his or her actions which are measurable through work. Ughamadu et al. (2024) referred to job performance as the execution, behaviour, adherence, or alignment with established guidelines or directives given by a superior or required by a job. This emphasizes that job performance should align with the prescribed standards for carrying out tasks. In line with this, Adinna et al. (2024) opined that teachers' job performance is primarily influenced by specific attributes such as their knowledge, sense of duty and curiosity. As noted by Ifediorah Okeke and Okaforcha (2020), job performance is a very considerable factor influencing profitability of any school. It is important for schools as teachers' job performance leads to the school effectiveness and successes. As noted by Ikwelle & Adinna (2022), Onyekwelu (2023), in the secondary schools, teachers' job performance apart from classroom teaching or instructional delivery includes supervision and monitoring of students' assignments and academic achievements, counselling students in academics, conducting students' assessment, exam invigilation and scripts marking, keeping important school records such as roll calls, execution of assigned administrative duties, among others.

Teachers' job performance referred to teachers' capacity to execute their jobs. Ogomaka et al. (2019), Manafa & Adinna (2023) maintained that teachers' job performance is the process whereby teachers accomplish or carry out the given work within or outside the school system satisfactorily to the extent that the output, when measured or seen, will show the expected behaviours from the teachers. Okaforcha (2021) and Ifediorah Okeke (2023) noted that teachers' job performance are analysed in terms of leadership function, executive function and interactive functions. On this note therefore, Usman et al. (2023) asserted that teachers' job performance can be measured through; annual report in terms of performance in teaching, lesson note preparation, lesson presentation, mastery of subject content, instructional proficiency, dedication to duty, commitment to assigned job and extra-curricular

activities. Other areas include effective leadership, effective supervision, effective monitoring of students' work, motivation, students' discipline, class control and management.

Contextually, teachers' job performance means the accomplishment of roles outlined for teachers in the school. It is how a teacher behaves while teaching and is related to their effectiveness. This involves the teaching-learning process that takes place in the classroom which include; provision and presentation of suitable lesson, use of appropriate methods of teaching, and use of current and proper instructional aides as well as assessment of students' performance. Good performance of students depends on the effective job performance of their teachers. In the same vein, teachers are expected to render improve job performance in schools when the principals apply good conflict management skills that suit the school activities. Teachers' job performance has been linked to principals' conflict management skills. Udeogu and Onyeizugbe (2024) reported that job performance was significantly related to conflict management in schools.

Conflict management is expressed in the principle that all conflicts may not necessarily be resolved but learning how to manage conflict can decrease the bad effects. It can also be defined as the practice of recognizing and dealing with disputes in a rational, balanced and effective way. Ekwesianya et al. (2020), Agu & Obiukwu (2022) submitted that conflict management is the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of conflict, to improve learning in an organization. Ibanga et al. (2023) averred that conflict management is a planned process required in an organization to arrive at a decision in an appropriate way of handling and resolving conflicts in order to promote peaceful culture and build a platform upon which the organizational goal could be attained.

Conflict management skills refer to those skills, techniques or approaches that can be used to prevent, control or resolve conflicts in schools. Onyali and Nnebedum (2023) stated that conflict management strategies may be defined as the practices, mechanisms or techniques put in place by the school principal in order to check the negative tendencies of conflict. However, resolution of conflicts in school management and leadership is not given much attention as school principals in Anambra state are not provided with pre-service training in conflict resolution, thus, majority of them lack knowledge in this field. This was also attested by Ughamadu et al. (2022) that school principals in Anambra State use their common sense or trial and error to deal with conflicts because they are not trained. This is a challenge school principals face because they have to deal with teachers who are professionals by virtue of their job, so one cannot rely on past experience to resolve conflicts; hence the need to apply scientific methods on how to resolve conflicts in an effective way.

Conflict management skills can help principals keep disputes and arguments from escalating out of control and making situations worse. Ibezim (2024) noted that conflict management skills empower principals to resolve disagreements smoothly, fostering stronger relationships and a more harmonious environment in the school. In the words of Edo and Johnson (2024), conflict management skills stand for internal mechanisms that enable individuals to get to the root of problems in order to resolve conflict in a manner that is acceptable to the conflicting parties. If conflict is resolved well, it brings about harmonious working relationship. Otherwise it leads to disunity among teachers and other staff. Conflict management skills are the skills that enable one to bypass personal differences and to open up to possibilities. Ikediugwu and Ibezim (2023) disclosed that the skills of conflict management draw one closer to other people, as they jointly search for fair solutions and balanced needs. Abdul et al. (2023) stated that effective communication, active listening, practicing empathy,

problem-solving, positive attitude and level headedness are skills suitable for conflict management in organizations.

School principals' knowledge in conflict management may bring a harmonious academic environment in the school. Nwogwugwu (2024) opined that principals' conflict management skills are the ability of the principals to effectively handle and resolve conflicts that arise within a school environment. These skills involve a combination of communication, negotiation, problem-solving and emotional intelligence techniques. Udeogu and Onyeizugbe (2024) averred that conflict management skills enable the school principals to address and defuse conflicts in a constructive and respectful manner, with the goal of reaching a mutually satisfactory resolution. These skills according to Udeogu and Onyeizugbe (2024) include active listening, empathy, diplomacy, assertiveness, effective communication, mediation, problem solving and the ability to facilitate open dialogue among team members. By honing these skills, principals can promote a positive work environment, improve team dynamics, and minimize the negative impact that conflicts can have on productivity and morale of teachers.

Contextually, principals' conflict management skills are the abilities that help principals handle and resolve conflicts in a constructive and respectful way. These skills help minimize the negative impacts of conflicts on students and teachers, even the people involved, and the entire school. They are basically what the school principal would do when he sense a disagreement emanating. These skills enable principals to bypass personal differences and open up to possibilities. The skills of conflict management draw principals closer to their staff, as they jointly search for fair solutions and balanced needs. School principals must possess good skills to effectively resolve dispute in their school. However, this study focused on two aspects of conflict management skills including active listening skill and problem-solving skill.

Active listening is the practice of giving someone your full attention, both verbally and nonverbally, to understand what they are saying. Ibezim (2024) credited that active listening is the practice of preparing to listen, observing what verbal and non-verbal messages are being sent and then providing appropriate feedback for the sake of showing attentiveness to the message being presented. Asiegbu and Emegwa (2024) defined listening skills as an active and constructive process that includes activating the listener to his previously obtained knowledge that aims to help him understand the listened text. Active listening plays a crucial role in the teaching-learning process. It has to do with paying close attention to the person who is speaking. People who are active listeners are well-regarded by their coworkers because of the attention and respect they offer others. While it seems simple, active listening skills can be hard to develop and improve. This form of listening conveys a mutual understanding between the speaker and the listener. Manafa *et al.* (2021) maintained that being a good listener is one of the best ways to be a good communicator. Active listening is a soft skill that is the basic technique for effective communication (Usman et al., 2023). This skill entails that the receiver of message listens to the speaker, understands what is being said and make meaning out of the communicated message. The skill of active listening is not just staying quiet while someone speak, or reading a document thoroughly, rather it involves using an open body stance and an animated face, to show that one is genuinely engaged. Thus, active listening skill leads to creating ability to curb or minimize problems in the school.

Problem-solving skills help individuals determine the source of a problem and find an effective solution to such problem. Onyali and Nnebedum (2023) noted that problem-solving

starts with identifying an issue. For example, a teacher might need to figure out how to improve students' performance on a writing proficiency test. To do that, the teacher will review the writing tests looking for areas of improvement. The teacher might see that students can construct simple sentences, but are struggling with writing paragraphs and organizing those paragraphs into an essay. To solve such writing problem, the teacher would work with students on how and when to write compound sentences, how to write paragraphs and ways to organize an essay. A true problem solver looks at a situation, find the cause of the problem and then come up with a reasonable solution that effectively fixes the problem or at least remedies most of it (Ibezim, 2024).

Public secondary schools in Anambra State have witnessed obvious loss of teachers' commitment to their professional responsibilities evidenced by poor attitude to duty and low performance of teachers in schools. More so, in some public secondary schools in Anambra State, teachers are said to be truants. Some come late to school, some teachers undertake irregular and unauthorized movement from school, some use the official hours for their private businesses, some do not exhibit zeal in performing assigned responsibilities, while some show low level of commitment to school activities. Due to this, some schools seem not to be living up to the expected standard of quality output despite the presence or availability of professionally trained teachers and facilities. At times, disloyalties, conspiracy, quarrels, among others, exist in public secondary schools between teachers, and between teachers and principals. This might have led to poor job performance of teachers in public secondary school in Anambra State. This poor teachers' job performance might also have connection to principals' conflict management skills which might have led the teachers unmotivated and demoralize their morale towards their job activities in the school. It is against these problems that the researcher sought to find out principals' conflict management skills as predictors of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to examine principals' conflict management skills as predictors of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Find out the predictive value of active listening skill on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. Ascertain the predictive value of problem-solving skill on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the predicative value of active listening skill on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. What is the predicative value of problem-solving skill on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Active listening skill does not significantly predict teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. Problem-solving skill does not significantly predict teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Method

The study was carried out in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study was a correlational research design. The population of the study was 267 principals in the 267 public secondary schools from the six Education Zones in Anambra State. The entire population of 267 principals was used for the study. Census sampling was used for the study because the population was small and manageable by the researcher. Two researcher-structured instruments were used for data collection: Conflict Management Skills Questionnaire (CMSQ) and Teachers' Job Performance Questionnaire (TJPQ). The instruments were subjected to face and construct validation. Face validation was done by three experts, while construct validation was carried out by Principal Component Analysis (PCA) approach. The reliability of the instrument was done using Cronbach Alpha method and the average coefficient values 0.82 for CMSQ and 0.85 for TJPQ were obtained and considered highly reliable and suitable for the study. Direct method of data administration was utilized by the researcher together with six research assistants. Out of 267 copies of the instrument administered, 265(99%) of the instrument were correctly completed and returned. Simple linear regression statistical tool was used to answer the research questions and test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Result

Research Question One: What is the predictive value of active listening skill on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 1: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on the Predictive Value of Active Listening Skill on Teachers' Job Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

	Unstandardized <i>B</i>	Std. Dev. <i>β</i>	Standardized <i>β</i>
Constant	28.516	4.367	
Active Listening Skill	0.735	0.311	0.675
R	0.675		
R ²	0.601		
Adj. R ²	0.553		

The summary of the simple regression analysis as shown in Table 1 indicated that the regression line has a positive intercept as presented by the constant value of 28.516. This means that if all the variables are held constant or fixed (zero) at the expense of active listening skill of principals, teachers' job performance will be valued at 29%. The analysis showed that active listening skill of principals positively predict teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State as shown by the regression coefficient ($R = 0.675$). Again, the standardized beta is also values at $\beta = 0.675$ which revealed that active listening skill of principals is a positive predictor of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This implies that a unit improvement in principals' active listening skilled to 0.675(68%) improvement in teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.601 indicated that the explanatory power of the variable was moderately strong. This implies that 60% of the variations in teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State were accounted for by the variations in principals' active listening skill. The adjusted R^2 supported the claim of the R^2 with a value of 0.553 indicating that 55% of the total variation in teachers' job performance was explained by active listening skill of principals. Thus,

adjusted R^2 supports the statement that the explanatory power of teachers' job performance moderately depends on active listening skill of principals in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Question Two: What is the predictive value of problem solving skill on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 2: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on the Predictive Value of Problem Solving Skill on Teachers' Job Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State

	Unstandardized <i>B</i>	Std. Dev. β	Standardized β
Constant	27.811	5.104	
Problem solving skill	0.724	0.226	0.664
R	0.664		
R^2	0.607		
Adj. R^2	0.548		

The summary of the simple regression analysis as shown in Table 2 indicated that the regression line has a positive intercept as presented by the constant value of 27.811. This means that if all the variables are held constant or fixed (zero) at the expense of principals' problem solving skill, teachers' job performance will be valued at 28%. The analysis showed that problem solving skill of principals positively predict teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State as shown by the regression coefficient ($R = 0.664$). Additionally, the standardized beta is also values at $\beta = 0.664$ which revealed that problem solving skill of principals is a positive predictor of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This implies that a unit increase in principals' problem solving skill led to 0.664(66%) increase in teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.607 indicated that the explanatory power of the variable was moderately strong. This implies that 61% of the variations in teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State were accounted for by the variations in principals' problem solving skill. The adjusted R^2 supported the claim of the R^2 with a value of 0.548 indicating that 55% of the total variation in teachers' job performance was explained by principals' problem solving skill. Thus, adjusted R^2 supports the statement that the explanatory power of teachers' job performance moderately depends on principals' problem solving skill in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: Active listening skill does not significantly predict teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 3: Test of Significance on the Simple Regression Analysis on Significant Prediction of Active Listening Skill on Teachers' Job Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State.

	Unstandardized β	Std. Dev. β	Standardized β	t-value	p-value
Constant	28.516	4.367		18.452	0.000
Active listening skill	0.735	0.311	0.675	24.191	0.000
R	0.675				
R ²	0.601				
Adj. R ²	0.553				
F	32.642				0.000

The summary of the test of significance of simple regression analysis as shown in Table 3 showed that the simple regression coefficient (R) is 0.675 while the R² is 0.601 and Adjust R² is 0.553. The F-ratio associated with regression is 32.642, the t-test is 24.191 and the p-value = 0.000. Since p-value (0.000) is less than the specified level of significance 0.05, the study therefore rejected the null hypothesis that active listening skill does not significantly predict teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State and accepted the alternative hypothesis that active listening skill significantly predicts teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: Problem solving skill does not significantly predict teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 4: Test of Significance on the Simple Regression Analysis on Significant Prediction of Problem Solving Skill on Teachers' Job Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State.

	Unstandardized β	Std. Dev. B	Standardized β	t-value	p-value
Constant	27.811	5.104		17.108	0.000
Problem-solving skill	0.724	0.226	0.664	23.672	0.000
R	0.664				
R ²	0.607				
Adj. R ²	0.548				
F	31.429				0.000

The summary of the test of significance of simple regression analysis as shown in Table 4 showed that the simple regression coefficient (R) is 0.664 while the R² is 0.607 and Adjust R² is 0.548. The F-ratio associated with regression is 31.429, the t-test is 23.672 and the p-value = 0.000. Since p-value (0.000) is less than the specified level of significance 0.05, the study therefore rejected the null hypothesis that problem solving skill does not significantly predict teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State and accepted the alternative hypothesis that problem solving skill significantly predicts teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Discussion of the Findings

Findings on the predictive value of active listening skill on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State revealed that active listening skill has a positive predictive value of 0.675(68%) on teachers' job performance in public secondary

schools in Anambra State. This means that increase in active listening skill of principals will bring about 68% increases in teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The study also showed that active listening skill of principals significantly predicted teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The finding is in consonance with the findings of Agu and Obiukwu (2022) that principals make an honest effort to listen to ideas from teachers which they implement for improving job performance in the schools. Chikendu (2023) affirmed that principals take notes when necessary and observe the feeling behind the words of their staff and find themselves not thinking about other things when teachers are expressing your opinions. Similarly, Abdul et al. (2023) findings indicated that principals do not interrupt teachers when making a point on issues as they watch for significant body language (expressions, gestures). Agreeing to the findings of the study, Ibezim (2024) findings showed that listening skills are habits that can be used to communicate effectively as it has a positive relationship with individual performance in schools. In the findings of Asiegbu and Emegwa (2024), they indicated that listening skills significantly predict teachers' job performance as the school principals control distracting habits in the environment and plan how they respond to their immediate environment for better productivity.

Findings on the predictive value of problem solving skill on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State revealed that problem solving skill has a positive predictive value of 0.664(66%) on teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This means that increase in problem solving skill of principals will bring about 66% increases in teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The study also showed that problem solving skill of principals significantly predicted teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The finding is in agreement with the findings of Ekwesianya et al. (2020) that principals normally solve problems quickly without wasting a lot of time on details which boost teachers' morale for hard word. Abdul et al. (2023) findings posited that principals do not get bored with routine and deal with new and complicated challenges on a regular basis which significantly predicts good job performance among teachers in schools. Onyali and Nnebedum (2023) findings indicted that principals are good problem solving individuals in schools and they are pretty good judge as to how others feel about problems and they do not let problems upset them, no matter how difficult they are. Nwogwugwu (2024) findings disclosed that principals really enjoy solving new problems; and when they face a problem, they try to analyze all the facts and put them in systematic order. Similarly, Ibezim (2024) agreed that problem-solving skills of school principals positively predict teachers' job commitment in schools as they could be able to control and minimize the ranging effects of conflicts in their schools for improve task performance. Agreeing to the findings, Udeogu and Onyeizugbe (2024) indicated that principals always ensure that all the staff were heard and are given a chance to speak, and come to a solution that everyone agrees to and resolve the problem.

Conclusion

Principals' conflict management skills and professional development programmes have shown to be important in educational system not only for the process of ensuring qualitative teaching and students' learning outcome but also in improving teachers' job performance. The study concluded that principals' conflict management skills are positive and significant predictors of teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Recommendations

In line with the findings and conclusion drawn, the following recommendations are made:

1. The school principals should develop the habit of being a good and active listener in order to build trust, reduce misunderstanding and improve their relationships with their staff in schools for improved teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. The principals of public secondary schools should be made to understand the benefits of good application of problem solving skill in managing conflicts in order to enhance and improve teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra
3. School administrators should by all means tackle the issues of improper conflict management skills through adequate practices of professional development programmes in the school system in order to improve teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

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