



## A Study of Conflict Inducing Factors in Secondary Schools' Principals-Teachers Relationship in Niger State, Nigeria

<sup>1</sup>Muhammad Baba, <sup>2</sup>Baba Wachiko, <sup>3</sup>Therasa Orakwe,  
<sup>1</sup>Department of Educational Foundations,  
<sup>2</sup>Department of Primary Education Studies,  
<sup>3</sup>Department of Educational Psychology,  
Niger State College of Education, Minna.

### ABSTRACT

This study investigated the factors contributing to conflicts in the relationship between principals and teachers in secondary schools within Niger State, a North-Central region of Nigeria. The research aimed to address two specific objectives, with corresponding research questions guiding the investigation. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study, involving a proportional and random selection of 365 principals and teachers from public secondary schools across the state. Data were collected using a self-designed instrument, the "Principal-Teachers Conflict Inducing Factors Questionnaire (PTCIFQ)," and analyzed using a weighted mean. The findings revealed a high level of conflict in the principal-teacher relationships in Niger State secondary schools. Key factors that contributed to these conflicts included immoral or antisocial behaviours, misappropriation of funds, authoritarian leadership by principals, favouritism, and insubordination, among others. The study concluded that principals and teachers in secondary schools often experience strained interpersonal and professional relationships, largely due to the factors above. To address these issues, the study recommended that principals receive training in effective leadership and conflict management strategies. Additionally, it emphasized the importance of regular school visits by supervisors to mentor both principals and teachers in fostering positive working relationships. The study also suggested granting principals adequate authority and immunity to effectively manage their schools.

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### INTRODUCTION

Secondary education is regarded as the most vital level of education in the entire Nigerian educational system. This is due to its strategic objectives which are very crucial to national development. Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) in the National Policy on Education, pointed out that generally, the goals of secondary education are two edged which are: preparation for useful living within the society and preparation for higher education. The policy document goes further to state the specific objectives of secondary education as follows:

- Provide all primary secondary leavers with the opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background;
- Offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles;
- Provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades;
- Develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world's cultural heritage;

Corresponding author: Muhammad Baba.

✉ [muhammadbaba740@gmail.com](mailto:muhammadbaba740@gmail.com)

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- e) Inspire students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence;
- f) Foster National unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity;
- g) Raise a generation of people who can thing for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those value specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens;
- h) Provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development.

To achieve these stated worthy objectives, there is need for principals as the head of secondary schools and their teachers to have a harmonious working relationship devoid of any conflict. It is believed that if principals and teachers fail to relate positively, character and academic performance of students could be affected adversely. It is based on this background that this study investigate conflict inducing factors in secondary schools' principals-teachers relationship in Niger State.

#### Statement of the Problem

The experience and observations of the researcher, from the reports of the supervisors on the effectiveness of school management in secondary schools in Niger State revealed that many principals are faced with numerous administrative and leadership challenges which seems difficult for them to resolve. Some of these challenges are conflict among teachers and between teachers and principals, indiscipline among students and teachers, poor school-community relation among others. To overcome these challenges, school managers need to be well equipped with necessary competencies and skills in human resource management (Mathibe, 2017).

Most worrisome among the challenges confronting secondary schools in Niger State was incessant conflicts between teachers and

principals which sometimes results into tension and suspense in schools (Baba, 2020). In other words, absence of cordial relationship among personnel in secondary schools is capable of affecting the school organizational climate in such schools which could impart negatively on staff productivity. As observed by Ezeaku & Ohamobi (2018), stakeholders are asking certain pertinent questions – what are the causes of conflict in secondary schools? What is the level of conflict areas between principals and teachers? Are there chances of ever resolving such conflicts? How can the goals of secondary education be realized if principals and teachers fail to cooperate and are always at daggers drawn? Has the conflict between both parties gone so far that peaceful resolution is now impossible? These and other questions are being asked and efforts need to be made to proffer answers for the benefit of educational development. As such, the problem of this study was to investigate the factors that promote conflict in the principals-teachers relationship in secondary schools of Niger State.

#### Objectives of the Study

Generally, the aim of this study was to investigate factors that breed conflicts in principals-teachers relationship in secondary schools. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to determine:

1. The level of conflicts in principals-teachers relationship in secondary schools of Niger State.
2. The factors that promote conflict in principals-teachers relationship in secondary schools of Niger State.

#### Research Questions

In line with the objectives, the following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the level of conflicts in principals-teachers relationship in secondary schools in Niger State?
2. What are the factors that induce conflicts in principals-teachers relationship in secondary schools of Niger State?

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Corresponding author: Muhammad Baba.

✉ [muhammadbaba740@gmail.com](mailto:muhammadbaba740@gmail.com)

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflict as defined by Ndayelechi (2018) is mutual disagreement in inter-human relationships. That is, a situation in which persons or group disagree over means or end, and try to establish their views in preference to others. This explains that conflict manifest in the forms of mutual suspicion, insults, name-calling, defamation of character, false accusations, withdrawal of love, withhold of salaries or wages, fringe benefits, demotion, termination of appointment boycott of classes and open violence among others. Olowonefa & Chukwudi (2017) asserted that conflict is produced from combination of individual characteristics and interaction patterns. He further stated that conflict, once started tends to escalate and may even produce further originating factors.

In secondary schools, principal-teacher relationship is expected to be very cordial towards a hitech-free running of the school. Among the qualities expected of a school head according to Olubadewo (2021) include; honesty, integrity, courteousness, sociable, charismatic and trustworthy. Teachers on the other hand are expected to respect and obey their principals as well as discharge their duties professionally.

Principals and teachers are often engaged in conflict over inability to live up to expectations in terms of their respective obligations. Some principals' leadership style promotes conflict and vice-versa. Generally, principals and teachers engage in conflict but the degree varies from school to school (Ezeoku & Ohamobi, 2018). As a result of misunderstandings, many principals have recommended their teachers to be suspended, demoted and dismissed according to Uchendu (2020). Teachers on the other hand have been instrumental in some principals' demotion, suspension and punitive transfer (Baba, 2020).

Management scholars have opined that conflict is part of human existence and to that effect, over the years, many strategies have proved effective in managing it especially within the educational sector. Ndayelechi (2018) and Olubadewo (2021) identified some of such strategies to include dialogue, arbitration, boxing

the problem, confrontation and negligence among others.

Obviously, no educational system can thrive in an atmosphere of conflict among its major actors especially school heads and teachers. To effectively address this problem, there is need to investigate those conflict inducing factors that erode principals-teachers confidence in one another and seek possible way forward in order to enhance the effectiveness of secondary education.

Although a number of studies on organizational conflicts which provided clues to this work are available, there is none that specifically investigate conflict inducing factors in secondary schools' principals-teachers relationship in Niger State. Thus, this study becomes unique to be conducted.

## METHODOLOGY

The study employed descriptive survey research design. This involved the selection and collection of data from a group of respondents who are considered representative of the entire population. It examines the opinions and perceptions of subjects on the variables of the study.

The population of the study comprised of all principals and teachers in public secondary schools of Niger State. The state had a total of 498 public secondary schools with a total number of 498 principals and 6,870 teachers (Report of the Committee on Head count of Teachers in public Schools in Niger State, 2023). Thus, the total population of this study is 7,368.

Sample of the study was selected through proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The strata that made up the population of this study were principals and teachers.

The sample size was determined using Research Advisors (2023) Sample Size Table. Using 95% confidence level and margin of error of 5.0% on the table, a total of 365 respondents were proportionately selected.

The instrument used for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire titled "Principals-Teachers Conflict Inducing Factors questionnaire" (PTCIFQ). It comprised of fifteen

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Corresponding author: Muhammad Baba.

✉ [muhammadbaba740@gmail.com](mailto:muhammadbaba740@gmail.com)

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(15) items. The first item had four response options of Very High (VH), High (H), Low (L) and Very Low (VL). The remaining 14 items were designed on four-point likert response options of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Strongly Disagreed (SD) and Disagreed (D). The instrument was validated by three experts, one in psychology from Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University Lapai (IBBUL) and two in Educational Administration and Planning from Niger State College of Education, Minna. To ensure reliability, the instrument was pilot-tested in FCT, Abuja, among thirty respondents. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to analyze the data collected

for reliability which gave an acceptable reliability coefficient value of 0.95.

A total of 365 questionnaires were administered on the sampled respondents by the researcher with the assistance of five research assistants. All the questionnaires were completed and successful retrieved.

Data collected were analyzed using the statistical tool of weighted mean to answer the research questions. 2.50 was taken as the decision mean. In order to obtain the weighted mean, each item under the four point response options was assigned the following values:

**Table 1:** Rankings of response options

Response Options	Rank	Real Limit
Very High (VH)	4	3.50-4.00
High (H)	3	2.50-3.49
Low (L)	2	1.50-2.49
Very Low (VL)	1	1.00-1.49
Strongly Agreed (SA)	4	3.50-4.00
Agreed (A)	3	2.50-3.49
Disagreed (D)	2	1.50-2.49
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	1	1.00-1.49

Items with mean ratings of 2.50 and above on the four point likert scale were regarded as "Accepted" while items with less than 2.50 were regarded as "Not Accepted".

## RESULTS

**Research Question 1:** What is the level of conflicts in principals-teachers relationship in secondary schools of Niger State?

**Table 2:** Mean responses of the respondents on the level of conflicts in principals-teachers relationship in secondary schools of Niger state.

S/N	Level of Conflicts	N	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1.	Very High (VH)	365	2.51	Accepted
2.	High (H)	365	3.82	Accepted
3.	Low (L)	365	1.84	Not Accepted
4.	Very Low (VL)	365	1.48	Not Accepted

Data presented in table 2 revealed the opinion of the respondents on the level of conflicts in principals-teachers relationship in secondary schools. The data indicated that the level of

conflicts in principals-teachers relationship was high.

**Research Question 2:** What are the factors that induce conflicts in principals-teachers relationship in secondary schools of Niger State?

Corresponding author: Muhammad Baba.

✉ [muhammadbaba740@gmail.com](mailto:muhammadbaba740@gmail.com)

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**Table 3:** Mean responses of the respondents on factors that induce conflict in principals-teachers relationship.

S/N	Conflict Inducing Factors	N	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1.	Absenteeism by teachers	365	2.68	Accepted
2.	Immoral/anti-social behaviours by both principals and teachers	365	2.54	Accepted
3.	Misappropriation of school funds	365	2.86	Accepted
4.	High-handedness by principals	365	3.50	Accepted
5.	Favouritism in dealing with staff by principals	365	3.52	Accepted
6.	Insubordination by teachers	365	2.86	Accepted
7.	Principals not leading by example	365	2.51	Accepted
8.	Perpetual late coming by teachings	365	2.68	Accepted
9.	Non-performance of duties by teachers	365	3.41	Accepted
10.	Inadequate communication within the school organization	365	3.51	Accepted
11.	Unnecessary meddling into school affairs by communities	365	2.48	Not Accepted
12.	Perception by teachers on principals not committed about their welfare	365	3.55	Accepted
13.	Burden of households as a result of economic challenges	365	4.94	Accepted
14.	Natural psychological emotional temperaments	365	3.53	Accepted

The results tabulated in table 3 showed that all the items except item 11 identified above were factors that induce conflicts in principals-teachers relationship in secondary school of Niger state.

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following major findings emerged from the study:

1. The level of conflict in principals-teachers relationship in secondary schools in Niger state was rated as high.
2. Immoral or antisocial behaviours, misappropriation of school funds, high-handedness, favouritism, and insubordination among others (see table 3) were positively rated as factors that breed conflict in principals-teachers relationship in secondary schools of Niger state.

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Finding of the study in respect to the first research question revealed that the level of conflict in principals-teachers relationship in secondary schools was high. This finding was in

consonance with Ezeoku & Ohamobi (2018) who discovered that principals and teachers in secondary schools were frequently engaged in disagreement and misunderstanding in their work relationship which impede effective school administration. In another affirmation to this finding, Baba (2022) reported principals, teachers and other school personnel were always involved in misinterpretations which usually manifested into poor school community relationship. This finding was further strengthened by Ndayelechi (2018) who stated that incessant hostility among personnels in secondary schools had contributed in lowering the productivity of teachers in such schools.

As regards research question two, the study discovered that immoral or antisocial behaviours, misappropriation of school funds, high handedness, favouritism and insubordination (see table 3) were among the factors that induce conflicts in principals-teachers relationship in secondary schools in Niger state. This finding agrees with the discovery of Olubadewo (2021) that conflicts in schools were mainly as a result of personality problems within the organization. He further stated that conflict in school organizations

Corresponding author: Muhammad Baba.

✉ [muhammadbaba740@gmail.com](mailto:muhammadbaba740@gmail.com)

Department of Educational Foundations, Niger State College of Education, Minna.

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could emanate from the performance of school head supervisory functions upon the staff. This implies that efforts of the principal in trying to induce action towards promoting productivity in the school may be met with resistance from the subordinates. This finding is further in agreement with UNICEF (2023) that among the causes of conflict in schools are: lack of commitment to duty by teachers, personality clashes and lack of professionalism among the school heads and staff.

This finding was also in conformity with the finding of Clike-Okoli (2023) that mutual mistrust, breakdown in communication and general liabilities of households due to contemporary economic hardship were among the causes of conflict in school organizations.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that the relationship between principals and teachers in secondary schools across Niger State falls short of the desired level of interpersonal harmony and professional collaboration. The study identified several critical factors contributing to this strained relationship, including immoral or antisocial behaviors, misappropriation of funds, authoritarian leadership styles, favoritism, and insubordination, among others. These issues not only hinder effective communication and cooperation but also negatively impact the overall productivity and morale within the school environment.

The absence of a positive working relationship between principals and teachers poses significant challenges to the effective administration and academic performance of secondary schools in the state. To address these challenges, there is an urgent need to implement practical and sustainable conflict resolution mechanisms. Such measures should aim to foster mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration between principals and teachers, thereby creating a more conducive and harmonious work environment.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of equipping school leaders with the necessary skills to manage conflicts constructively and to promote a culture of transparency,

accountability, and inclusivity. By prioritizing these efforts, secondary schools in Niger State can enhance their operational effectiveness, improve teacher satisfaction, and ultimately provide a better learning experience for students.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Authorities in Niger State, such as Ministry of Education, Niger State Secondary Education Board and Niger State Science and Technical Schools Board should organize capacity building workshops on school leadership for principals.
2. Study on effective conflict resolution strategies should be conducted and findings should be disseminated to school principals for implementation.
3. School supervisors need to visit schools regularly and mentor principals and teachers on acts of promoting harmonious working relationship.
4. Misbehaviour cases and unethical issues should be closely monitored and appropriately dealt with in accordance with laid regulations by the authorities.
5. Principals should be given adequate authority and immunity to take charge of their schools without external interference.

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Corresponding author: Muhammad Baba.

✉ [muhammadbaba740@gmail.com](mailto:muhammadbaba740@gmail.com)

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Corresponding author: Muhammad Baba.

✉ [muhammadbaba740@gmail.com](mailto:muhammadbaba740@gmail.com)

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