

## Conflicts and Improvement Strategies for Coexistence among Secondary School Teachers in Isiala Mbano LGA, Imo State

\*<sup>1</sup>Ozioma Anyanwu and <sup>2</sup>Ndudi Onyinyechukwu Akalonu

<sup>1</sup>Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

<sup>2</sup>C/o P.O. Box 28 Ulakwo, Owerri, Imo State

\*Correspondence: cutiegold@gmail.com; 08036621995

### Abstract

*This study was embarked on to find out the conflicts and improvement strategies adopted for coexistence among secondary school teachers in IsialaMbano L.G.A. The cross-sectional survey research design was adopted and three research questions guided the study. The multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select a sample of 108government secondary school teachers that were used for the study. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-made questionnaire which was validated by three experts in research work and the reliability of the instrument was also determined using the Spearman Rank Order correlation formula and a correlation coefficient of 0.85 was obtained. The data were analysed using frequencies and percentages. The following findings emerged: Secondary school teachers experienced a lot of conflicts. These conflicts cut across, communication conflict, goal conflict, personality conflict and others. The study showed that the commonest coexistence strategies employed by the teachers were compromising, accommodating, collaborating, among others. It was then recommended that periodic training are provided for teachers in IsialaMbanoLocal Government Area.*

**Keywords:** Conflict, Coexistence, Improvement, Strategy, Teachers, Secondary Schools

### Introduction

Conflict is a fact of life in any workplace, as long as people compete for jobs, resources, power, recognition and security. Conflict is regarded as the discord that occurs when the goals, interests or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible with those of other individuals or groups; they block or frustrate each other in an attempt to achieve their objectives. Meks (2014) defined conflict as a disagreement among groups or individuals characterized by antagonism and hostility. This is usually fuelled by the opposition of one party to another, in an attempt to reach an objective different from that of the other party.

Conflicts could present itself as Economic conflict, is brought about by a limited amount of resources. The groups or individuals involved then comes into conflict to attain the most of these resources, thus bringing forth hostile behaviours among those involved. Another form of conflict is value conflict; it is concerned with the varied preferences and ideologies that people have as their principles. Conflicts driven by this factor are demonstrated in wars wherein separate parties have sets of beliefs that they assert (in an aggressive manner at that). Power conflict can also occur when the parties involved intend to maximize what influence it has in the social setting. Such a situation can happen among individuals, groups or even nations. In other types of conflict, power is also evident as it involves an asserting of influence to another. These types of conflicts could also be present in the workplace.

Differences in interests thought process, perception as well as the need may lead to conflict; when individuals do not agree to each other's opinion, a conflict may arise. Conflict may occur at any place be it home, church and even at the workplace. Today's workplaces have presented the largest diversity of generations with distinct work ethics, deep-seated attitudes, opposing perspectives and diverse motivators. Such differences have to lead to the emergence of various management challenges of such diversity at work. These challenges have resulted in conflicts and strife at work (Owoyemi, Elegbede &Gbajumo-Sheriff, 2011). Employees who grew up in different periods have different world views, expectations, values and preferred modes of communication and interacting with one another, these views may be in opposition to the others (Jones, 2019).

In any workplace, there are many causes of conflicts; however, conflicts mostly arises within an individual when the person is uncertain about what task is expected of him to do, especially if the task is not clearly defined by the supervisor or the person in charge. Furthermore, if the tasks of individuals working as a group are not clearly defined by the management they will lead to more conflicts. The conflict between individuals may result from a lack of or insufficient communication and role-related pressures (Asma, 2017). Asma further stated that managers need to communicate with workers. When there is no communication, conflicts are inevitable, and workers resent the focus of management on cutting costs and improving efficiency.

Conflicts would arise between individuals in a particular group, or groups of individuals if the goals are not specified for individuals within a group, or a particular group (Longe, 2015). Additionally, the following are other sources of conflicts within an organisation namely: sharing of resources especially manpower, money, materials, equipment and space required among departments. Goals in a workplace sometimes conflict with each other. If your boss says turnaround time is critical and you say it's in-depth, high-quality service, a conflict could ensue among them. Then there are times when conflicts occur between department goals and organizational goals. Conflicts like these confuse and slow down the achievement of objectives (Kaitelidou, 2012). Resources are very scarce, people will always have to compete for them and the result will lead to conflict. Interdependent may also lead to conflict, this usually occurs when two or more units depending upon one another to complete work of a product especially when a product passes through stages, one unit would complete work in good time, but other units might delay the outcome of the whole product. The management might blame all units involved in each process which might lead to a conflict. Incompatible personalities, which are psychological, might affect the employees not to get along with each other and this difficulty might lead to conflicts, which result from formal interactions with other employees.

Conflict comes naturally; the clashing of thoughts and ideas is a part of the human experience. It can indeed be destructive if left uncontrolled. However, it shouldn't be seen as something that can only cause negative things to transpire. Besides conflict also will be potentially destructive in groups especially when it consumes individual members' energies instead of concentrating on other productive activities of the organisation. Similarly, some of these problems, which might arise due to conflict, are poor social health, lack of cooperation, poor communication, wasted and contagious conflict. Discriminatory conflicts can arise from personal prejudices on the part of employees or perceptions of mistreatment of employees due to the nature of their employment (David, 2009). It is a way to come up with more meaningful realizations that can certainly be helpful to the individuals involved. These positive outcomes can be reached through effective implementation of coexistence. Conflict can be seen as an opportunity for learning and understanding our differences. We can all live harmoniously despite conflicts as long as we know how to responsibly manage these struggles.

Coexistence is described as to exist together, at the same time, or in the same place. It is to live in peace with another or others despite differences, especially as a matter of policy. When conflict arises, there is a need for employees to coexist, so that it becomes a positive force, rather than a negative force, which would threaten the individual or group. Sussane (2019) opined that if conflicts arise and individuals do not coexist properly, it will lead to delays of work, disinterest and lack of action and in extreme cases, it might lead to a complete breakdown of the group, and in some cases poor health of the people involved. Inability to coexist will result in withdrawal of individuals and unwillingness on their part to participate in other groups or assist with various group action programs in the workplace, hence there is need for proper conflict management strategies by the people involved.

Several strategies that will make for coexistence were suggested by Davis and Kraus (2010) which included avoidance, reconciliation and/or compromise or award. Avoiding is also known as withdrawing. It is a low-stress approach that one might attempt when other methods of conflict resolution are not an option, (Rander, 2016). It is a method when one does not want to address the conflict and simply withdraws. Accommodation is an adaptation process, (Kazimoto, 2013). It can be called a smoothing approach. Accommodation involves having to deal with the problem with an element of self-sacrifice; an individual sets aside his concerns to maintain peace in the situation. Compromising is a lose-lose approach where both parties are willing to sacrifice their own set of goals as long as the other party will do the same (Jason, 2015). Collaborating method is a novel style that makes sure both sides are satisfied. Sometimes it is effective in complex situations. Avoidance of conflict often leads to intensified hostility and may later cause greater problems for the group. Therefore, one of the first steps in coexistence is to recognize that a conflict situation exists. However, conflict can interfere with work process and create so much interpersonal hostility that group members may become unwilling or unable to work with others in achieving the organisational objectives. Unresolved conflicts which may be in form of avoidance tend to grow into bigger conflicts, the more it grows, the greater the chance of causing more problems (Zampieron, 2010). This situation may be found in various workplaces like schools where teachers work.

Teachers are one of the most influential and powerful forces for equity, access and quality in education and key to sustainable global development. However, their training, recruitment, retention, status and working conditions remain preoccupying. Teachers are humans too, they also possess varying values which may be a source of conflict among them in their places of work. This situation is a pathetic one and it requires change, because the teachers are the people in whose hands the training of the future leaders of any nation is in. However, the exact conflicts experienced by teachers in IsialaMbano Local Government Area remained unclear. It was against this

background that the researcher decided to investigate the conflicts and improvement strategies for coexistence among secondary school teachers in Isiala Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study.

1. What are the demographic factors associated with secondary school teachers in Isiala Mbano LGA?
2. What are the conflicts commonly experienced by secondary school teachers in Isiala Mbano LGA?
3. What are the strategies to improve coexistence among secondary school teachers in Isiala Mbano LGA?

### Methods

The cross-sectional descriptive survey research design was used for the study. This design describes the situation as they exist in their natural setting and determines the relationship that exists between specific events (Nworgu, 2006). This design is, therefore, appropriate for this study. The population of the study consisted of all the 753 teachers in all the government-owned secondary schools in Isiala Mbano LGA, Imo State. The sample consisted of 108 teachers drawn using a multi-stage sampling procedure. The first stage involved drawing ten per cent of the 28 autonomous communities in Isiala Mbano LGA, giving a total of approximately 3 autonomous communities. The second stage involved a random selection of 1 secondary school from each of the 3 autonomous communities in stage one. In stage three, all the teachers in the 3 secondary schools selected in stage two were used for data collection. Through these procedures, a sample of 108 respondents was selected for the study.

The instrument for data collection was a researcher-made questionnaire designed to collect data on secondary school teachers' conflicts and strategies to improve coexistence. It was a 14-item close-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire was validated by three research experts from the Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation formula. A correlation coefficient of 0.85 was obtained. The instrument was administered face to face and collected after completion personally by the researchers to ensure maximum return, there was a hundred per cent return rate. The responses were analysed using frequencies and percentages.

### Results

**Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Secondary School Teachers**

Variable	Frequency	Per cent
Age (in years)		
25 – 34	8	7.4
35 – 44	41	38.0
45 – 54	49	45.4
55 – 64	20	18.5
Marital status		
Unmarried	37	34.3
Married	71	65.7
Gender		
Male	46	42.6
Female	62	57.4
Employment status		
Permanent	91	84.3
Temporary	17	15.7

The result in table 1 showed that the majority 49 (45.4%) of the teachers were in the age bracket of 45 – 54. This was closely followed by the age bracket of 35 – 44, 41 (38.0%) and age bracket of 55 – 64, 20 (18.5%). The result also showed that the least number of teachers fall in the age bracket of 25 – 34, 8 (7.4%). This implies that majority of the teachers are well along in age, thus they have already formed values, opinions which are as old as they are which may be difficult for them to change and may be causing conflict among them in their workplace.

**Table 2: Conflicts of Secondary School Teachers**

Conflicts	Yes n (%)	No n (%)
Communication conflict	97 (90)	11 (10)
Goal conflict	87 (80)	21 (20)
Ethics / value conflict	81 (75)	27 (25)
Personality conflict	65 (60)	43 (40)
Role conflict	53 (49)	55 (51)
Financial /money conflict	49 (45)	59 (55)
Overall	67	33

The result in table 2 showed that communication conflict 97 (90%) was the commonest conflict among secondary school teachers. This was followed by Goal conflict 87 (80%) and Ethics /value conflict 81 (75%) as indicated by the respondents. The result also showed that the least experienced conflict by the teachers was Financial /money conflict 49 (45%). The overall result showed that conflicts were experienced by teachers.

**Table 3: Strategies to Improve Coexistence among Teachers**

Coexistence strategies	Yes n (%)	No n (%)
Compromising	91 (84.3)	21 (19.4)
Accommodating	87 (80.6)	17 (15.7)
Collaborating	63 (58.3)	45 (41.7)
Avoiding	52 (48.1)	56 (51.9)
Competing	46 (42.6)	62 (57.4)
Overall	62.8	37.2

The results in table 3 showed that compromising 91 (84.3%) was the most used coexistence strategy among the teachers. This was followed by accommodating 87 (80.6%) and collaborating 63 (58.3%) as indicated by the respondents. The result also showed that the least coexistence strategy employed by the teachers was competing for 46 (42.6%) and followed by avoiding 52 (48.1%). The overall results show that the teachers made efforts to employ coexistence strategies.

## Discussion

The study indicated that the greatest proportion of the teachers who were aged 35 – 54 involved in conflicts. This is evident in the data available in Table 1 which showed that 83.4% of the teachers fall into that age bracket. Nonetheless, this result was not surprising because it was in agreement with the age bracket of people found in a workforce, of which teachers are not an exemption. This is also in support of the study by Jones (2019) that suggested that Employees who grew up in different periods have different world views, expectations, values and preferred modes of communication and interacting with one another. The implication of this development therefore is that conflicts will become unavoidable in the workplace since it is not only one age group of people that will be found in the workplace.

Employment status of the respondents as a demographic factor was also looked at in the study. As to whether the respondents had permanent employment or temporary employment, majority of the respondents (84.3%) had permanent employment, thus, they could afford to fall out with any person who does not share same views and opinions with them. Similarly, David (2009) observed that discriminatory conflicts can arise from personal prejudices on the part of employees or perceptions of mistreatment of employees due to the nature of their employment. Having permanent or temporary employment may be one of the factors that predispose the respondents to causes leading to conflicts.

Various types of conflicts were established in this study. It was clear that the highest proportion (90%) of the teachers experienced communication conflict. The finding was in line with the earlier study where Alsma, 2017, established that if there is this no communication, conflicts are inevitable. Goal conflict also accounted for 80% of the types of conflicts experienced by teachers as shown in Table 2. This revelation was per the study of Kaitelidou (2012) that showed that goals in a workplace sometimes conflict with each other. Then there are times

when conflicts occur between department goals and organizational goals. Conflicts like these cause confusion and resentment.

Furthermore, it has been known that when efforts are not made for individuals to coexist properly, it will lead to delays of work, disinterest and lack of action and in extreme cases, it might lead to a complete breakdown of the group. Inability to coexist will result in withdrawal of individuals and unwillingness on their part to participate in other groups or assist with various group action programs in the workplace (Davis & Kraus, 2010). This might account for the finding of the study the majority of the teachers employed compromising (91%) and accommodating (87%) to improve coexistence among them. Thus, peaceful coexistence is actualisable and should be encouraged.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that secondary school teachers in Isiala Mbandu LGA experienced a lot of conflicts. The study revealed that communication conflict was the most common. Goal conflict was also experienced by teachers. The study showed that Ethics /value conflict and personality conflict were also experienced by the teachers. The study showed that strategies employed by the teachers to improve coexistence among them included compromising, accommodating, collaborating and avoiding. The teachers may have started to employ these strategies when they noticed the damaging effects of conflicts. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The government should provide periodic training for teachers to enable them to understand fully the various characteristics of individuals that may lead to conflicts.
2. Teachers should on their strive to work out what behaviours works best for each one to stop conflicts even before it starts.
3. The golden rule: Treat others the way you want to be treated should be adopted by the teachers.

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