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**Conflicts and the Effectiveness of Compromise and Mediation as Conflict Resolution  
Strategies Adopted by Secondary School Principals in Akwa Ibom State**

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BY

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**ABSTRACT**

*The main purpose of this study was to investigate into secondary school conflicts and the effectiveness of compromise and mediation as conflict resolution strategies in Akwa Ibom State. Two purposes of the study, two research questions and one hypothesis were raised. The study adopted an Ex-post facto correlational survey design method. The population of the study comprised all the public senior secondary school principals and teachers of senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom state. A sample of 990 principals and teachers participated in the study. Cluster and Simple random sampling techniques were used to draw the sample. The instrument used for the study was titled “Secondary School Conflicts and Effectiveness of the Resolution Strategies Questionnaire (SSC-ERSQ)”. It was recommended that, The study recommends that, school principals, students and teachers should adopt compromise as it can be used to get a quick solution, with the prevention of further escalation. Disputants should be encouraged to mutually agree to give up on their pride in order to reach a compromise for the sole essence of prevailing peace. In using the meditative strategy, the use of productive talk during conflicts should be highly encouraged as it is the most dramatic effect for the peer mediators. This strategy if well implemented leads to increased self-image, social morality, and improved vocational-educational attitudes.*

**KEYWORDS: Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Compromise, Mediation**

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**Introduction**

Conflict is a situation where there is disagreement between parties. It connotes a stressful, unhappy, distressing, depressing, annoying and frustrating state of affairs. According to Mullins (2005) conflict is a behaviour intended to obstruct the achievement of some others person’s goal; (p. 904). Based on Mullins (2005), conflict has common elements with dispute and the two are sometimes used synonymously. This is so because the two terms, conflict and dispute, both involve depriving the other of something valuable. The nature of the work or activities carried out in organisations causes conflict to occur often. There might be conflict where the work of one person depends on that of another person. It is just like a department depending on another department. Conflict may be more if reward is tied to production and one-person effect possess a constraint on other productivity.

Sometimes inequality in members also occurs as a source of conflict in organisations. Organisation members who perceive inequality or unfairness in personal policies and practices; in the reward offered to the organisational members, can initiate conflict either by individuals or groups. Violation of people also occurs as a source of conflict. Mullins (1996) suggested that territorial defense typical of animal is also characteristics of human behaviour. People tend to guard what is their own like, their own rooms; their own parking spaces, their

own area of work or even, their own clients, and in the case of students, their personal belongings, they resent someone else intruding into their territories. Those who attempt to intrude are treated with suspicions and resentments which may result in conflict. Ownership of territories may be conferred on the individuals by the organisational chart (role) through work producers or through management decision (e.g. membership of committees are selected by management). If someone who was not listed as a member attends the committee meeting, other members might resent him and this could lead to conflict. Ownership of Territories may also be inferred through the informal organisation, which detects the norms and tradition of the group. These and lot more build conflict in schools, organizations and any social group. Managing these conflicts and making the best out of diversity had constantly been the concern of managers and/or leaders of these organizations. This study therefore seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of conflict management strategies such as compromise and mediation between students and principals.

Using compromise to settle a conflict or dispute requires the parties involved to be consciously aware that the outcome might be less than they had originally hoped for. The final decision may be one that is acceptable but not optimal. There can be reluctance or resistance to using compromise as an approach to conflict resolution when the result seems like a loss. However if the focus is on what is achieved, rather than on what has been given up, there is a greater likelihood that the parties will leave with feelings of satisfaction and acceptance (Tolan, 1994). Compromise is more successful when the parties have a range of tangible outcomes that are open for consideration such that the final decision is one that remains "within the box" for both parties. The compromising strategy typically calls for both sides of a conflict to give up elements of their position in order to establish an acceptable, if not agreeable, solution. This strategy prevails most often in conflicts where the parties hold approximately equivalent power. Business owners frequently employ compromise during contract negotiations with other businesses when each party stands to lose something valuable, such as a customer or necessary service (Tolan, 1994).

On the mediation strategy, Deutsch (2003) reported of a programme at the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution, from Teachers' College, Columbia University, which trained several students from one high school in New York City in cooperative Learning and Conflict Resolution. At the end of the training, it was however reported that on the whole, as students improved in managing conflicts, they experienced increased social support, improved relations, higher self-esteem, increases in personal control, and high academic performance (Deutsch, 2003). Moreover, the benefit of mediation conflict resolution strategy as found out by researchers, was that the most dramatic effect for the peer mediators was increased self-image, social morality, and improved vocational-educational attitudes.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to investigate into secondary school conflicts and the effectiveness of compromise and mediation as conflict resolution strategies in Akwa Ibom State. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To establish the effectiveness of compromise in resolving conflicts in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State as compared to other strategies.
2. To determine the effectiveness of mediation in resolving conflicts in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State as compared to other strategies.

## Research Questions

The following questions guided the researcher in the course of the study:

- 1 To what extent is compromise effective in resolving conflicts in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?
- 2 To what extent is mediation effective in resolving conflicts in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?

## Research Hypothesis

The hypothesis for the study states:

1. There is no significant effect of compromise on effective conflicts resolution in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State
2. There is no significant effect of mediation on effective conflicts resolution in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State

## Literature Review

### The Structural Theory of Conflict Management

The structure conflict management theory holds that interpersonal relationships are not the only causes of conflict. Altering the underlying structure of organisations are potential sources of conflicts too. The structural approaches to conflict management aims at reducing conflict using organisational strategies like placing emphasis super-ordinate goals, reducing differentiation, improving communication and so on. The super ordinate goals elements of structural conflict maintains that one way to minimize conflict is by everyone focusing on the “super ordinate goals” (Nyamajiwa, 2000). Super ordinate goals are the overall corporate-wide goals which are more important than the departmental or individual goals from which conflict emanates. Focusing attention on the super ordinate goals is particularly useful, where conflict is caused by goals incapability and differentiation. By increasing commitment to corporate-wide goals, employees experience less conflict with co-workers with respect to competing individual or departmental level of goals (Jacoby 1994).

Super ordinate goals offset the problem of differentiation because they establish a common frame of reference. Heterogeneous team members may perceive different ways of achieving corporate objectives, but the super ordinate goals strategy ensures that both parties mutually understand and agree upon the objectives themselves. Based on the recent study of top management teams, the most effective decision-making group consistently applies this strategy (Kruger, 1994). They frame their decisions as collaborations thereby drawing attention and commitment away from sub-level goals. Thakore (2013) however has a contrary opinion by maintaining that super-ordinate goals fails and that this happens when it can establish a common or unified frame of reference which is expected to resolve conflict amicably.

The thinking behind the structural approach is that by improving the opportunity, ability and motivation to share information, the parties develop less extreme perception of each other than if they relied on stereotypes and emotions. Communication is particularly important where the need for technical expertise make it difficult to reduce differentiation. Some organisations introduce “dialogue meetings”, where disputing parties discuss their differences

(Mullins, 2005). This is an aspect of Organisational Development (OD) called “intergroup development”. Dialogue is supposed to help the participants to understand each other’s perceptions and fundamental assumptions so that they can create a common mental model for the organisation. Dialogue can also occur informally simply by giving the parties more opportunities to interact with each other. Inter-group development is an Organisational Development (OD) strategy which is essentially structural conflict management intervention model. In this model, the parties discuss their perceptions of each other and look for ways to improve their relationships by correcting misconceptions of one another. This approach is necessary where the relationships between two or more persons or between departments are openly hostile. “Inter-group development (mirroring)” may need the assistance of a trained facilitator. The basic thing is for the conflicting group to express their perceptions, discuss their differences and then work out strategies to improve the relationship. By so doing both sides share images of themselves and of each other so that distortion and misunderstandings are revealed and ultimately corrected.

### **Compromise Conflict Resolution Strategy and Its Effectiveness in Resolving Conflicts in Secondary Schools**

Compromise as described in Picard, (2012) is a win and lose agreement in which both parties get something of what they want but not all of what they want. Most disputes typically start with a competitive or collaborative strategy where the best possible outcome is the goal for both sides. However a number of factors such as time requirements, financial costs, use of power and influence, and practical matters often enter into the equation. The realization that initial desired goals may be unachievable move parties to a negotiation process involving give and take in order to reach a compromised mutual agreement. (Schmidt & Friedman, 2005).

There may be a need to "agree to disagree" on some points when dispute seems intractable and the reality that they will not be able to totally agree sets in. (Eilerman, 2006). Agreeing to disagree is required more often when there is disagreement over values or principles rather than facts or methods. When both parties are able to truly listen and attempt to respectfully understand the position of the opposing party they can often come to accept their disagreements. The mutual acceptance of differences increases the likelihood of a productive resolution to the dispute (Eilerman, 2006).

According to Schmidt and Friedman (2005), several studies show that individuals who have a preference for using the compromise mode in managing conflict have a thinking orientation toward decision making. These people are more likely to be objective in their assessment of differences and use factual information when weighing their options. Individuals with a thinking preference typically make pragmatic decisions based on deductive reasoning. When attempting to manage a conflict they will be more inclined to accept or suggest a compromise when this seems to be the most viable thing to do. People with a "feeling" preference will be less likely to desire compromise as a mode for resolving differences. These individuals are concerned about the impact of decisions on themselves or others and would prefer to collaborate for a win/win outcome when possible (Eilerman, 2006). When collaboration is not an option they are more apt to avoid dealing with the problem or may accommodate others in order to reduce stress and keep the environment stable. Agreeing to a compromise will likely feel like a loss if the outcome has a negative impact on them or those they care about. The other dyads (Extrovert-Introvert, Sensing-Intuition, and Judging-Perceiving) do not show any consistent patterns related to the compromise conflict mode. Therefore

mediators, coaches and supervisors need only observe the thinking-feeling dyad when integrating into their work with clients or employees who are engaged in the use of compromise (Eilerman, 2006).

Finally, compromise is often a useful strategy when dealing with relatively small concerns. This differs from an accommodating strategy, in which the conceding party finds an issue unimportant that the opposing party considers comparatively important. A manager might enlist a compromise approach most effectively when both parties consider the issue to be of moderate or little importance. In such cases, compromising saves both parties the time required to employ problem-solving techniques to address the fundamental core of the conflict. While all of these modes have their place among the strategies available to the manager,

### **Mediation Conflict Resolution Strategy and Effective Strategies in Resolving Conflicts in Secondary Schools**

Mediation, according to Schmidt and Friedman (2005). is an alternative to the traditional disciplinary practices (detention, suspension, and so on.) that occur in schools. It is a structured process that enables two disputing parties/individuals to talk out and resolve their differences with the assistance of a pair of neutral peers. The end result is a written contract. Mediation is a voluntary process. The conflicting parties must agree to resolve the problem together or they may instead choose to proceed through traditional disciplinary measures.

Evaluations from the Community Board projects in San Francisco show that conflicts in the school decreased. The principals of the four schools using the Conflict Manager programme stated that "conflict managers" made significant contributions to a calm, friendly atmosphere on the playgrounds. They noted that what students learned about resolving conflicts on the playground was carried into the classrooms and resulted in less teacher time on "refereeing disputes". These principals also observed that "conflict managers" taught what they had learnt to their parents, siblings, and friends" (Davison, 1985).

Benenson (1992) implemented the Community Board Programme in an elementary school in central Illinois and evaluated its effects on how students who were trained in conflict resolution skills dealt with their sibling conflicts at home. Students trained as conflict managers reported a significant decline in the frequency and intensity of conflicts with their siblings. Parents of these children perceived a similar decline in the frequency of conflicts and their need to intervene. They reported a significant improvement in their children's use of productive talk during conflicts.

Johnson and Dudley (1999) reported of implementing a peer mediation programme in a middle-class elementary school in sub-urban Minneapolis. Peer mediation training was conducted in four stages: (a) introduction to conflict training; (b) negotiation training; (c) mediation training; and (d) periodic refresher lessons to refine students' negotiation skills. Once training was completed, the students were exposed to peer mediation opportunities. Each day the teacher would choose two students to class mediators for each class. The mediators would wear mediator t-shirts, patrol the playground and lunchroom, and be available to mediate conflicts that occurred in the classroom or school. Teachers reported that, after the training, conflicts among students became less severe and destructive. Conflicts referred to the teacher were reduced by 80 percent and those referred to the principal were reduced to zero. Many students reported using negotiation and mediation skills at home with their siblings. Several parents said they observed carry-over effects at home. Trained students

were much more likely than untrained students to discuss conflicts and negotiate solutions. When placed in a simulated conflict situation four to five months after the training had ended, pairs of trained students engaged in more negotiation steps than did pairs of untrained students.

Olczak, (2001) reported of the Peace Movement of the 1960s and 1970s when several community-based dispute resolution centres emerged across the United States and Canada. These centers promoted mediation as a speedy, humane, and less expensive alternative to the courts (Olczak, 2001). The mediation strategy was based on the concept of "win/win" solutions (resolutions that address the needs of both disputants). Community-based dispute resolution centres typically mediated landlord-tenant matters, environmental concerns, family and divorce cases and a variety of other community problems. They tried to assist disputants to reach agreements through mediation rather than litigation. Participants typically report satisfaction with the process and outcomes and were often more accepting of the outcomes than parties who sought justice in the courts (Olczak, 2001). Since then, the number of community based dispute resolution agencies was reportedly increased. Many were said to have developed and promoted school-based conflict resolution programmes.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

According to the review, compromise conflict resolution strategy involves bargaining and mutually giving up something to reach a settlement. It can be used to get a quick solution, with the prevention of further escalation. In relation to the case study adopted for this study, conflict between students can be resolved amicably if the parties mutually agree to give up on their pride to reach a compromise. The review also noted that, Mediation conflict resolution strategy is a voluntary process. Conflicting parties must agree to try to solve the problem together or may choose to proceed through traditional disciplinary actions.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

The research design used for the study was Ex-post facto correlational design.

#### **Area of the Study**

The study area is Akwa Ibom State.

#### **The Study population**

The population of the study comprised all the public senior secondary school principals and teachers of senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom state. There are 234 principals and 19,624 teachers distributed into 234 public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State (Statistical Department of Akwa Ibom State Secondary Education Board, 2013).

#### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

A sample size of 990 respondents was used for the study. The samples were obtained through cluster and random sampling techniques. Teachers in the state will be clustered into senatorial districts. The "hat and draw" random sampling technique was used in selecting 10 percent of teachers from each senatorial district and the purposive sampling technique was used for selecting the principals by taking the principals from schools where the teachers were selected.

### Instrumentation

The main instrument of research was a researcher-developed questionnaire called the ‘Secondary School Conflicts and Effectiveness of the Resolution Strategies Questionnaire (SSC-ERSQ)’.

### Validation of the Research Instruments

The instrument was face and content validated by an expert in test, measurement and evaluation. The corrections and comments were incorporated into the final form of the instrument.

### Reliability of the Instruments

The Cronbach coefficient alpha reliability technique was used to test the reliability of the instrument (SSC-ERSQ).

### Statistical Treatment of Data

The collected data was coded and extracted from the questionnaire for analysis. The statistical techniques used for the analysis were descriptive statistics (mean) and standard deviation while simple regression analysis was used to analyse the hypotheses. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Comparison of mean would be used to compare the degree of effectiveness of each conflict resolution strategy.

### Hypothesis testing

#### Hypothesis one

The null hypothesis states that there is no significant effect of compromise on effective conflicts resolution in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. In order to test the hypothesis regression analysis was performed on the data, (see table 1).

**TABLE 1: Simple Regression Analysis of the effect of compromise on effective conflicts resolution in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State**

Model	R	R-Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of the Estimate	R Square Change
1	0.94	0.88	0.88	0.97	0.88

**\*Significant at 0.05 level; df= 348; N= 350; critical R-value = 0.113**

The table shows that the calculated R-value 0.94 was greater than the critical R-value of 0.113 at 0.5 alpha level with 348 degree of freedom. The R-Square value of 0.88 predicts 88% of the effect of compromise on effective conflicts resolution in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. This rate of percentage is highly positive and therefore means that there is significant effect of compromise on effective conflicts resolution in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. It was also deemed necessary to find out the extent of the variance of each case of independent variable as responded by each respondent (see table 2).

**TABLE 2: Analysis of variance of the effect of compromise on effective conflicts resolution in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State**

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2459.32	1	2459.32	2593.15	.000b
Residual	330.04	348	0.95		
Total	2789.36	349			

a. Dependent Variable: Conflicts Resolution

b. Predictors: (Constant), Compromise

The above table presents the calculated F-value as (2593.15) and the P-value as (000). Being that the P-value (000) is below the probability level of 0.05, the result therefore means that there is significant effect of compromise on effective conflicts resolution in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

### Hypothesis Two

The null hypothesis states that there is no significant effect of mediation on effective conflicts resolution in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. In order to test the hypothesis regression analysis was performed on the data, (see table 3).

**TABLE 3: Simple Regression Analysis of the effect of mediation on effective conflicts resolution in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State**

Model	R	R-Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of the Estimate	R Square Change
1	0.99	0.98	0.98	0.43	0.98

\*Significant at 0.05 level; df= 348; N= 350; critical R-value = 0.113

The table shows that the calculated R-value 0.99 was greater than the critical R-value of 0.113 at 0.5 alpha level with 348 degree of freedom. The R-Square value of 0.98 predicts 98% of the effect of mediation on effective conflicts resolution in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. This rate of percentage is highly positive and therefore means that there is significant effect of mediation on effective conflicts resolution in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. It was also deemed necessary to find out the extent of the variance of each case of independent variable as responded by each respondent (see table 2).

**TABLE 2: Analysis of variance of the effect of mediation on effective conflicts resolution in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State**

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2723.76	1	2723.76	14449.12	.000b
Residual	65.60	348	0.189		
Total	2789.36	349			

a. Dependent Variable: Conflicts Resolution

b. Predictors: (Constant), Mediation



The above table presents the calculated F-value as (14449.12) and the P-value as (000). Being that the P-value (000) is below the probability level of 0.05, the result therefore means that there is significant effect of mediation on effective conflicts resolution in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

### **Discussion of the findings**

In table 1 and 2 the result therefore means that there is significant effect of compromise on effective conflicts resolution in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The result therefore is cognate to the research findings of Tolan (1994), compromise is more successful when the parties have a range of tangible outcomes that are open for consideration such that the final decision is one that remains "within the box" for both parties. The significance of the result caused the null hypothesis to be rejected while the alternative one was retained.

The result therefore means that there is significant effect of mediation on effective conflicts resolution in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The result therefore is cognate to the research findings of Deutsch (2003) on the mediation strategy, reported of a programme at the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution, from Teachers' College, Columbia University, which trained several students from one high school in New York City in cooperative Learning and Conflict Resolution. The significance of the result caused the null hypothesis to be rejected while the alternative one was retained.

### **Recommendations**

The study recommends that, school principals, students and teachers should adopt compromise as it can be used to get a quick solution, with the prevention of further escalation. Disputants should be encouraged to mutually agree to give up on their pride in order to reach a compromise for the sole essence of prevailing peace.

In using the meditative strategy, the use of productive talk during conflicts should be highly encouraged as it is the most dramatic effect for the peer mediators. This strategy if well implemented leads to increased self-image, social morality, and improved vocational-educational attitudes.

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