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**Principals' Conflict Management Strategies and Students' Discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South East Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

*The main purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between principals' conflict management strategies and students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The correlational survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 3,547 SS2 students from Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria. A sample of 400 SS2 students was selected using multistage sampling technique. The instruments for data collection were two structured questionnaires which were face validated by two experts in educational management and one expert in measurement and evaluation. The instruments were pilot tested and reliability coefficients determined using Cronbach Alpha reliability method. The test of reliability using Cronbach Alpha yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.82 and 0.88 for clusters A and B respectively with an overall reliability co-efficient of 0.85 for PCMSQ and 0.84 for SDQ. Pearson product moment correlation was used to analyse data for the study. Findings revealed that principals' collaboration conflict management strategies and principals' accommodation conflict management strategies have significant and high positive relationship with students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria. Based on these findings, the researcher recommended that the Federal Ministry of Education should establish regular training programs for principals, which will improve their capacity for collaboration conflict management strategies. It was also recommended that the Federal Ministry of Education should provide principals with sufficient support that will enable them to effectively implement accommodation conflict management strategies.*

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**Keywords:** Conflict Management Strategies, Students' Discipline, Principals, Collaboration, Accommodation, Federal Unity Schools

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**Introduction**

Education in Nigeria has long been viewed as a crucial aspect of social and economic growth. However, it faces challenges like poor infrastructure, regional disparities, and the impacts of insecurity and conflict. Secondary education plays a vital role in preparing young people for further learning and active citizenship. Still, it struggles with issues such as low funding, crowded classrooms, outdated curricula, and strikes that disrupt teaching and learning. The success of secondary education in Nigeria largely depends on how disciplined the students are.

Student discipline is considered essential for achieving positive results in education. Okesina and Famolu (2022) described student discipline as behaviour that support school objectives, including following rules, respecting authority, and actively engaging in learning. Some scholars highlight that student discipline is multidimensional. Ojo (2025) noted that it covers both following school rules and taking proactive steps to

create a positive learning environment. Additionally, student discipline involves self-control, effort, and surrounding influences. Dorathy et al. (2025) explained it as taking personal responsibility in ever-changing school settings, which is shaped by motivation and available resources. Efferebo (2025) stated that student discipline drives effective education through active participation, proper classroom behaviour, and strategies that support achievement. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on the type of discipline that maintains learning over time. Idiong et al. (2024) defined high student discipline as behaving with respect, cooperation, and commitment, noting that it is positively related to better engagement and the effectiveness of institutions. This study defines student discipline as a combination of following rules, being socially responsible, and pursuing personal growth. This approach helps learners in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria engage in quality education, keep order, and contribute to school improvements.

Despite the recognized importance of discipline, there appears to be a significant lack of it among students in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria. This is evident from low engagement, irregular attendance, and a tendency to behave disruptively rather than seeking academic success. Research from South-East Nigeria highlights these issues, showing patterns of low discipline that impede effective learning. Egbo and Ene (2025) supported these observations, noting that many students show low discipline and lack of initiative, choosing distractions over classroom responsibilities, which undermines learning and school standards. Ayeerun (2021) pointed out that disengagement is a critical problem in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria, where students display little interest in collaborative activities, do not fully follow rules, and face increased risks of truancy due to poor discipline. Orunbon et al. (2025) stated that the lack of motivation for discipline among students leads to procrastination, negative attitudes towards school rules, bad habits, and withdrawal from extracurricular activities, all of which harm education quality. Dorathy et al. (2025) added that low self-regulation among students contributes to inadequate engagement, resulting in decreased confidence and effectiveness. Some researchers, like Ikhielea (2023) and Tamunodiepiriye et al. (2022), suggest that school leadership styles may impact student discipline, especially through principals' approaches to conflict management.

A secondary school principal serves as the instructional leader who promotes ongoing professional growth for teachers by advocating for them, providing access to resources, and using influence to drive positive change in the educational community (Uchenna-John et al., 2025). Clifford and Ejike (2022) explained that school principals implement leadership styles like transformational, transactional, and servant leadership, which affect teachers' satisfaction, motivation, and commitment. Ogodor et al. (2024) described school principals as leaders in complex bureaucratic organizations who determine overall school performance and influence students, teachers, and staff through planning, enforcing rules, and managing teacher-related activities. Orunbon et al. (2025) stated that school principals are crucial for improving school quality, helping students achieve educational goals and personal growth, with leadership being second only to classroom teaching in its impact on student learning. Operationally, principals are the main executives in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria, overseeing daily functions, resource distribution, and staff management. They also handle conflict resolution within their schools.

The term conflict has been defined in different ways by various authors. For example, Tamunodiepiriye et al. (2022) described conflict as a mutual interference of parts, actions, and reactions within a social system. Ikhielea (2023) explained conflict as a situation where one party feels its interests are opposed or harmed by another party. According to Clifford and Ejike (2022), conflict includes any difference in interests, goals, or priorities between individuals, groups, or organizations, or a failure to meet task requirements. Conflicts between principals and teachers arise from differences in interests and perceptions, often creating tension in

school administration (Uchenna-John et al., 2025). Ogodor et al. (2024) noted that these conflicts happen when parties pursue preferred outcomes that block others, resulting in hostility and breakdowns in relationships. Orunbon et al. (2025) defined conflicts as misunderstandings between parties that impede organizational activities. Examples include principals showing bias, not allowing teachers to express their views, publicly criticizing staff, teachers responding rudely, and disputes over resource allocation (Clifford & Ejike, 2022; Ikhielea, 2023). Some conflicts involve disagreements about workload distribution, where principals assign extra duties without consultation, leading to resentment, or conflicts regarding disciplinary actions for students, which creates friction in enforcing rules (Tamunodiepiriye et al., 2022). Uchenna-John et al. (2025) identified conflict as a clash of interests, values, actions, or directions that often leads to conflict. The goal of conflict management should be to resolve conflict by addressing the underlying causes of the issues and finding solutions that are fair and acceptable to the conflicting parties (Tamunodiepiriye et al., 2022). This requires school principals to adopt appropriate conflict management strategies.

Conflict management strategies represent internal methods that help authorities reach the root of problems to resolve issues in a way that satisfies both parties (Clifford & Ejike, 2022). When conflict is resolved effectively, it fosters a harmonious working relationship; if not, it causes division among teachers and staff. Principals' conflict management strategies are strategies that help resolve disputes. They involve teachers affected by the conflict to change their perspectives, gain from the situation, and improve classroom discipline and student academic supervision. Conflict management strategies are essential for principals, allowing them to be a driving force for positive change in schools (Uchenna-John et al., 2025). Therefore, principals must be aware of conflict resolution strategies, as conflicts are unavoidable (Ogodor et al., 2024). Conflict management strategies include techniques or methods to prevent, control, or resolve conflicts in schools. Knowledge of conflict resolution strategies among school principals can create a peaceful academic environment (Ikhielea, 2023). However, little attention is given to resolving conflicts in school management and leadership in South-East Nigeria, as many principals lack pre-service training in conflict resolution. Orunbon et al. (2025) confirmed that school principals often rely on common sense or trial and error to handle conflicts because of their lack of training. This presents a significant challenge since principals must deal with teachers who are professionals, making it crucial not to rely solely on past experiences but to apply effective methods for conflict resolution. Thus, the link between conflict and student discipline relies on the conflict management strategies employed by principals. School principals can manage conflicts using collaboration and accommodation strategies, which are the focus of this study, along with other effective techniques in modern organizations.

In collaboration strategy, principals work jointly with each teacher in the school. Tamunodiepiriye et al. (2022) stated that collaborative strategies involve leaders working cohesively with their staff to increase efficiency through cooperation. Clifford and Ejike (2022) mentioned that a collaborative conflict management style, sometimes called problem-solving or integrating, aims to address differences through negotiation so that all parties benefit. This approach prioritizes the concerns of both groups involved. Ogodor et al. (2024) described collaboration as a problem-solving method. This strategy is particularly effective in schools because it promotes teamwork, idea sharing, and addressing differences. The collaborating conflict management strategy is distinctly different from the accommodation style.

The accommodation strategy involves principals finding a middle ground or setting aside some of their concerns while prioritizing others' needs. Uchenna-John et al. (2025) noted that accommodating strategy is moderately assertive and cooperative, aiming to achieve a compromise. This negotiation strategy seeks an acceptable solution for both parties during a conflict. In accommodating strategy, principals ensure that both

sides are left in a better position after the conflict is resolved. However, Ikchiele (2023) observed that principals often do not negotiate with teachers to resolve conflicts, instead relying on their authority. This approach can exacerbate conflict in schools because teachers are not allowed to voice their ideas on handling specific issues. This pushes for adopting collaboration as the preferred conflict management strategy. Accommodation, like collaboration, is another conflict management strategy.

In modern society, principals typically use accommodation to resolve conflicts in schools, prioritizing the needs of teachers and staff. Orunbon et al. (2025) suggested that principals admit mistakes and take responsibility for their actions within the school. Accommodating is a strategy employed by principals who value their relationships with staff members more highly. For this reason, principals should embrace learning from others to manage conflicts more effectively. Clifford and Ejike (2022) remarked that accommodation as a conflict resolution style involves each party surrendering specific interests and values to establish peace. However, the downside to this style is that the problem may resurface in a different form later on. Accommodation strategy focuses on ensuring that principals prioritize the desires and needs of teachers, promoting peace in the workplace. The connection between these conflict management strategies and student discipline has not been rigorously explored in South-East Nigeria. This research aims to investigate the conflict management strategies of principals and their influence on student discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Federal Unity Schools are institutions established by the federal government of Nigerian with the aim of fostering national unity, academic excellence, and discipline among the student population. These are boarding schools that operate within a structured administrative framework geared towards maintaining order, facilitating the effective discharge of the academic role of the school, and creating a productive learning environment for the student population. However, recent observations and reports suggest that student indiscipline and student-conflict situations still exist in some of the Federal Unity Schools in the South-East region of Nigeria. These include cases of junior students being bullied by senior students, cases of hostel conflicts, cases of violations of school regulations, cases of classroom indiscipline, and cases of disrespect for school authority, among others. These cases are on the increase. For instance, some senior students are reported to have delegated some school tasks to junior students, intimidate, and create a hostile relationship among the student population.

Some student cases also suggest a lack of academic commitment on the part of the student population, as evident from the noise-making during lessons, absenteeism from school, and the lack of interest in academic activities. Such cases are a major cause for concern as they create a barrier for those who are committed to their academic work. The fact that these cases are still prevalent raises questions about the methods the school principals use to resolve student-conflict situations. As the school principals are the ones charged with the responsibility of maintaining order and resolving student-conflict situations, the prevalence of student indiscipline cases raises a question about the effectiveness of the methods the school principals use to resolve student-conflict situations. This informed the need for an empirical investigation on the correlation between principals conflict-management strategies and student discipline in the Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria is the main reason for the research.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study is to investigate principals' conflict management strategies and students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined the relationship between principals:

1. collaboration conflict management strategies and students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria.
2. accommodation conflict management strategies and students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between principals' collaboration conflict management strategies and students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between principals' accommodation conflict management strategies and students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria?

### **Hypotheses**

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

1. There is no significance relationship between principals' collaboration conflict management strategies and students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria.
2. There is no significance relationship between principals' accommodation conflict management strategies and students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

The correlational research design was adopted for the study. The study was conducted in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria. The population of the study comprised 3,547 SS2 students of Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria. These schools are Federal Government College Ohafia, Federal Government College Okposi, Federal Government Girls College Onitsha, Federal Government College Nise, Federal Government College Okigwe, Federal Government Girls College Umuahia, Federal Government College Enugu, Federal Government Girls College Lejja, Federal Government Girls College Owerri, Federal Government College Ikot Ekpene, Federal Science and Technical College Ohanso, Federal Science and Technical College Awka, Federal Science and Technical College Oguta, and Federal Science and Technical College Amuzu. The sample of the study comprised 400 SS2 students of Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria. Multistage sampling technique was adopted for the study. First, simple random sampling technique was used to select 10 out of the 14 Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria. Then, proportionate stratified sampling technique was used to select 400 SS2 students from the selected schools. Two structured questionnaires developed by the researcher were used to collect data for the study. The first instrument was titled "Principals' Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire (PCMSQ)". The instrument contains 20 items spread in two clusters, A and B. Cluster A contains 10 items on principals' collaboration conflict management strategies. Cluster B contains 10 items on principals' accommodation conflict management strategies. The instrument was structured on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA)-4, Agree (A)-3, Disagree (D)-2, Strongly Disagree (SD)-1. The second instrument was titled "Students' Discipline Questionnaire (SDQ)". The instrument contains 15 items on students' discipline. The instrument was structured on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA)-4, Agree (A)-3, Disagree (D)-2, Strongly Disagree (SD)-1.

To ascertain the face and content validity of the instrument, the instrument was presented to three experts; two in Educational Management Department and one in the Measurement and Evaluation Unit of the Department of Educational Foundations in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Furthermore, a pilot test was conducted by administering the instruments to 20 SS2 students of Federal Unity Schools in South-South Nigeria. The test of reliability using Cronbach Alpha yielded reliability co-efficient

of 0.82 and 0.88 for clusters A and B respectively with an overall reliability co-efficient of 0.85 for PCMSQ and 0.84 for SDQ. The instrument was administered to the respondents through on the spot delivery or electronically. Out of 400 copies of the questionnaire administered on the respondents, 315 were returned in good condition and used for data analysis. Pearson product moment correlation was used to analyse data for the study. For the hypotheses, if the probability value (p-value) was less than or equal to 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. If the p-value was greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

**Results**

**Research Question One:** What is the relationship between principals’ collaboration conflict management strategies and students’ discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria?

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significance relationship between principals’ collaboration conflict management strategies and students’ discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria.

**Table 1: Summary of Pearson Correlation Analysis between Principals’ Collaboration Conflict Management Strategies and Students’ Discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria**

Variables		Principals’ Collaboration Conflict Management Strategies	Students’ Discipline	Remark
<b>Principals’ Collaboration Conflict Management Strategies</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.733**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	High Positive/Significant Relationship
	N	315	315	
<b>Students’ Discipline</b>	Pearson Correlation	.733**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	315	315	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Data in Table 1 reveals that the Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient is  $r = 0.733$ . This shows that a high positive relationship exists between principals’ collaboration conflict management strategies and students’ discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria. This implies that in schools where principals apply collaboration conflict management strategies, students discipline improves. Thus, there is a high positive relationship between principals’ collaboration conflict management strategies and students’ discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria. Furthermore, the p-value of 0.00 is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that there is a significant relationship exists between principals’ collaboration conflict management strategies and students’ discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria.

**Research Question Two:** What is the relationship between principals' accommodation conflict management strategies and students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria?

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significance relationship between principals' accommodation conflict management strategies and students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria.

**Table 2: Summary of Pearson Correlation Analysis between Principals' Accommodation Conflict Management Strategies and Students' Discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria**

Variables		Principals' Accommodation Conflict Management Strategies	Students' Discipline	Remark
<b>Principals' Accommodation Conflict Management Strategies</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.714**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	High Positive/Significant Relationship
	N	315	315	
<b>Students' Discipline</b>	Pearson Correlation	.714**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	315	315	

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Data in Table 2 reveals that the Pearson's Correlation Coefficient is  $r = 0.714$ . This shows that a high positive relationship exists between principals' accommodation conflict management strategies and students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria. This implies that in schools where principals apply accommodation conflict management strategies, students discipline improves. Thus, there is a high positive relationship between principals' accommodation conflict management strategies and students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria. Furthermore, the p-value of 0.00 is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that there is a significant relationship exists between principals' accommodation conflict management strategies and students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria.

### Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that there is a high positive relationship between principals' collaboration conflict management strategies and students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria. This is because collaboration conflict management strategies empower principals in resolving conflicts through joint problem-solving, teamwork, and shared decision-making, which foster a positive school environment conducive to student discipline. This is because collaboration enables principals to involve teachers and students in addressing disciplinary issues, promoting mutual respect and compliance. This is in line with Clifford and Ejike (2022), who asserted that collaborative conflict management strategies are associated with effective resolution of student conflicts in secondary schools, resulting in improved discipline and school harmony. This is also in line with the study, which asserted that collaborative approaches mediate the relationship between principal leadership and student behavioural outcomes. This is because collaboration is

strong in principals who are highly effective in maintaining student discipline. Moreover, Tamunodiepiriye et al. (2022) asserted that there is a high level of conflict resolution through collaboration among educational leaders, leading to better student engagement and discipline. This is because collaborative conflict management is highly associated with disciplined learning environments. Furthermore, the study established a significant relationship between principals' collaboration conflict management strategies and the enhancement of students' discipline. This is because collaboration is a key factor in promoting orderly conduct among students by addressing root causes of indiscipline collectively. This is in line with Ogodor et al. (2024) who asserted that collaborative strategies enhance school administration and positively influence student behaviour. This is because principals who actively engage in collaborative conflict resolution are likely to achieve higher levels of student discipline.

The findings also revealed a high positive correlation between principals' accommodation conflict management strategies and students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria. This could be as a result of the fact that accommodation strategies enable principals to prioritise harmony by yielding to others' concerns, reducing tensions and modelling respectful behaviour that encourages student compliance. Therefore, principals can accommodate differing views in disciplinary matters, leading to a supportive atmosphere where students feel valued and adhere to rules. This finding is consistent with Uchenna-John et al. (2025), who revealed that accommodation conflict management positively correlated with effective school administration and contributed to improved student discipline through peaceful resolutions. Similarly, Ikhielea (2023) revealed that accommodation strategies positively contributed to managing challenges in secondary schools and the adaptation of disciplinary strategies for better outcomes. Additionally, Orunbon et al. (2025) revealed that accommodation in conflict management positively contributed to teacher satisfaction and student behavioural improvement in secondary schools. Also, the study revealed a significant correlation between principals' accommodation conflict management strategies and the integration of effective student discipline. This indicates that accommodation plays a vital role in enhancing principals' capacity to foster disciplined environments. This finding is consistent with Ayeerun (2021) who revealed that accommodative approaches significantly contributed to adherence to school rules and regulations. Therefore, principals who are competent in accommodation strategies are more likely to achieve sustained student discipline.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, the study concludes that principals' conflict management strategies have a significant and positive relationship with students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria. The study revealed that principals' collaboration conflict management strategies and principals' accommodation conflict management strategies have significant and positive relationship with students' discipline in Federal Unity Schools in South-East Nigeria. It is therefore imperative that measures are put in place to promote the adoption of effective conflict management strategies by principals in schools so as to help in the attainment of improved student behaviour and school harmony.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. The Federal Ministry of Education should consistently organise training programmes for principals, which will improve their capacity for collaboration conflict management strategies. This is expected to improve their capacity for joint problem-solving through teamwork, shared decision-making, and involving stakeholders in addressing disciplinary issues.

2. The Federal Ministry of Education Schools should provide principals with sufficient support that will enable them to effectively implement accommodation conflict management strategies. This will encourage principals to prioritise harmony by yielding to concerns in disciplinary matters, which will improve peaceful resolutions and student compliance in their respective schools.

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