

# Impacts of Language Use in Conflict and Conflict Resolution among Senior and Junior Secondary School Principals in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The study was carried out to access the impacts of language use in conflict and conflict resolution among principals of senior and junior secondary schools in Ebonyi State. To guide the study, three research questions were formulated. Literatures by scholars that are relevant to the study were reviewed to close existing gap in scholarship. The design of the study was descriptive survey. The population consisted of all the principals in all the government-owned secondary schools in the education zones of the five South Eastern states. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 30% of the public secondary schools in the South Eastern States of Nigeria, and each state in the South East formed a stratum. All the principals (both senior and junior) from the schools selected were used. A 31-item researcher-developed questionnaire was constructed, validated, trial-tested and used to elicit data from the respondents. The administration of the instrument was done by the researchers and three research assistants in three education zones from each of the states. Data obtained were presented and analyzed using frequency and simple percentage to answer the research questions. The study revealed that principals in the study area do not show consideration for the feelings of their counterparts in interaction, although they converse calmly and amicably with their counterparts; majority of the respondents prefer to apply strategies for avoiding conflict instead of those for minimizing conflict after it has ensued. The researchers recommended, among other things that, in addition to conversing calmly and amicably with their counterparts, principals in the study area must begin to show consideration for the feelings of their counterparts in interaction.

**Keywords:** Language use, rapport management, linguistic politeness, conflict resolution, principals.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Conflicts are common features of social life. In fact, no human society is devoid of conflict. As [1] observed, conflicts occur in all kinds of human relationships and in all social settings. Conflict is a process where people's interests and activities confront, block and disable the realization of one party's objectives. [1] further added that the potential differences among people are wide and so any meaningful interaction can signal conflicts. More so, conflict in secondary school is multifaceted – teacher versus teachers, teacher(s) versus principal(s), students versus teachers, principals versus students, etc. Financial (mis)managements, preferential treatments, and ineffective communication even where there

are no basic incompatibilities, among others, are some of the causes of conflicts in secondary schools.

The world view of education as the bedrock of development in every clime still stands unchallenged. Various countries of the world strive to attain or maintain a high standard of education in order to achieve commensurate development. However, the Nigerian case is a different ball game. There has been an age-long cry about the fallen standard of education in Nigeria. The conglomerate of the causes of this problematic standard has been tackled from diverse perspectives, including government vantage point, learners' perspective, teachers' factor, and system's/program angle. Principals as custodians of secondary schools have huge responsibilities of managing, supervising, organizing activities, and implementing curricula of academic programs in their schools [2]. The introduction of the Universal Basic Education (henceforth UBE) in 1999 by the then president of Nigeria, President Olusegun Obasanjo changed the system of education from the 6-3-3-4 to the 9-3-4 system to provide free, universal and basic education for every Nigerian child. This was a right step in the right direction as it became a positive response to the objectives of the Rights of the Child, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), UNICEF and even the 'Education for All' conference held in Jomsien in 1990 to salvage developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa educationally. Within the same year, precisely on September 29th, 1999, the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) was launched and its Act, which is its legal framework, was later signed into law in May, 2004 for its effective take off [3]. Consequently, the secondary school (as we know it) is split into two segments – the junior and the senior secondary schools – with two different principals (administrators). However, the two segments are still housed in the same premises in many states (especially in the South Eastern States). This is where the crux of this study lies.

The UBE was primarily designed to provide free and compulsory education for children in primary and junior secondary schools in the country with quality and efficiency as its watchword. This means that any child between the ages of 6 and 16 years is entitled to a childhood care and education encompassing nine years of formal schooling. Invariably, the formal primary school age becomes between six and twelve

years while the junior secondary school age falls within twelve and fifteen years. Hence, a primary school is then one that provides a six year basic course of full time instruction suitable pupils between the age of six and twelve, while junior secondary school refers to that school which provides a three-year post-primary course of full-time instruction apt for pupils within the ages of twelve and fifteen.

All these programs are usually planned and decked with beautiful objectives and program implementation strategies, but they are often truncated at the bureaucratic level where conflicts of various magnitudes ensue as a result of one interest or the other. Thus, the various stakeholders involved must be well selected and areas of jurisdiction clearly defined to ensure proper implementation. For instance, stakeholders like Board members (Universal Basic Education Board-UBEB), committee members (e. g. School-Based Management Committee – SBMC), Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), school principals, and Parents/Teachers Associations (PTA) ought to have well-articulated duty specifications in order to avoid conflict or even managerial encroachment during implementation. This is essential because leadership problem has been identified, among other things, as one of the challenges facing UBE. In other words, several challenges are presently confronting the realization of the set objectives of UBE in Nigeria.

Two education systems with different funding bodies – Universal Basic Education System and State Secondary Education System – co-habit the same environment to maintain good rapport and tolerance; their staff share common staffrooms, belong to the same staff welfare association, conduct assembly for the entire students together on the same ground, and they even interchange teachers as a result of a shortage of staff. The question remains: Is this type of fusion working? With two captains steering the same ship in a bid to lead their crew to achieve the specific and general objectives of their programs, interests and aspirations often clash and result in conflicts.

Many conflicts could be avoided if caution is exercised in language use in interactions. For instance, in managing conflicts, politeness should be the watchword. Language is used to construct, maintain and/or threaten social relations. Thus, it must be explored in full to promote harmony and smoothness of relations among people. These researchers feel that lack of skills in communication and in resolving conflicts result in tension and misunderstanding, thus, a good deal of importance should be attached to pragmatic language use in interactions.

Conflict in secondary schools, like any other organization, is a reality. The world view of education as the bedrock of development in every clime still stands unchallenged. To attain or maintain a high standard of education in order to achieve commensurate development, however, every organ of the education system must work together in relative harmony. The federal government empowers principals via their State

School Management Boards to administer secondary schools. This implies that principals have total control of every resource (both human and material) in the school. However, with the advent of UBE (a part of which is the junior secondary school), the power of the principals of secondary schools became impeded. This impediment lies on the fact that the two systems are made to share many things in common such as the same infrastructure; conduct assembly for the entire population of students together on the same ground, and even interchange teachers as a result of shortage of staff. The principal, who initially was the highest authority, now has to contend with another leader (albeit ‘junior’) who also desires to protect and defend their domain. Thus, conflict was born in secondary schools among the principals.

Conflicts and conflict resolution in secondary schools have been a major concern of scholars for over two decades but little or no attention is paid to the place of language use as the cause or as a means of conflict resolution. Also, studies on politeness in interactions among secondary school personnel have hitherto been neglected in the academic world. These researchers feel that language is an important component in passing information and managing rapport and should be explored to eradicate friction to improve productivity in secondary schools. Hence, the need to fill this observed gap in scholarship. Therefore, this research investigates the place of language use in the causes and resolution of conflicts among junior and senior secondary school principals in South East Nigeria.

## II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions are formulated to guide the study:

1. What is the effect of language use on conflicts among senior and junior secondary school principals?
2. What is the effect of language use in conflict resolution among senior and junior secondary school principals?
3. What pragmatic and rapport management strategies can be used to redress conflicts among senior and junior secondary school principals?

## III. CONCEPTUALIZATION

### 3.1 Conflict/Conflict Resolution

Conflict as a concept has received diverse definitions from many scholars. The present researcher’s attention is drawn to the definition given by [4] as “a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources in which the aim of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired value, but also, to neutralize, injure or eliminate the rivals.” Further, [5] defined conflict as a form of friction, disagreement, or discord arising within individuals or a group when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group. [6] added that conflict pertains to the opposing

ideas and actions of different entities, thus resulting in an antagonistic state.

[5] identified the causes of conflicts as specialization, common resources, goal differences, interdependence, authority relationships, status differences, jurisdictional ambiguities, roles and expectations. [7] gave diversity as a source of conflict. He explained that increasing heterogeneous factors such as, differences in age, cultural background, ethics, and values greatly generate conflict among employees in a workplace.

In addition, [4] posited that effective administration of Nigerian secondary school system largely depends on a cordial and co-operate working relationship among principals, teachers, proprietors, and students. However, this is a difficult task as [1] observe that conflict is an integral part of human organizations worldwide. Thus, efforts must be made to manage or resolve conflicts to promote school development. Accordingly, [5] identifies conflict-handling strategies such as avoiding, collaborating, compromising, accommodating and mediation. All these can be done with appropriate use of language.

### 3.2 Language Use

Language is vital in every sphere of life. Broadly, language has dual functions – transfer of information and management of social relations [8]. Invariably, the dynamics of language use is such that can lead to conflicts as well as its resolution. This dynamics of language use gives importance to an area of pragmatics that has come to be recognized as Politeness. Politeness is a pragmatic strategy used to reduce tension, trivialize issues for mutual understanding and promote peaceful co-existence.

Similarly, [9] opined that language is used to resolve or escalate disputes. According to him, conflict resolution relies heavily on word choices because the words people use in the world escalate harmonious living or existential war fronts. According to [10], language uses us as much as we use language. This is because, as much as our choice of forms of expression is guided by the thoughts we want to express, to the same extent, the way we feel about the things in the real world governs the way we express ourselves about these things. In addition, use of language embodies attitudes as well as referential meanings.

As can be seen, language use can cause or reduce conflicts. Thus, language users must carefully choose their words in order to create harmonious social relations and not disrupt peace in the society. Language as a divine gift is at the centre of man's existence and survival as a social being. People can hardly co-habit in the isolation of language because of its communicative function. Undoubtedly, communication is paramount for harmonious living. For this reason, people should not just strive to attain linguistic competence but acquire pragmatic competence which is the knowledge of using forms and strategies in an appropriate context.

## IV. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Politeness in speech helps in the management of rapport. Politeness theory has been around for a couple of decades but researchers in Nigeria seem to have neglected it, especially as it concerns interactions among personnel in the school system. There are many influential scholars and studies on politeness (such as [10]; [11]; [12]; [13]; [14]; [8]; etc.). In addition, the different politeness models have had to contend with many criticisms. However, these criticisms notwithstanding, the politeness principles proposed by [10] has been successfully applied to larger corpora of natural language usages. Thus, the theory is considered sufficient for the present study because, according to the theorist, politeness refers to forms of behaviour that have been developed in societies to reduce friction in personal interaction.

[10] invented a Politeness Principle based on what is called Pragmatic Competence which is the ability to use language appropriately considering to whom we are talking (Tenor), what we are talking about (Field), and how we are talking (Mode). She was inspired by Grice's Cooperative Principle which describes how people interact and behave with each other in a conversation. [10] proposed three politeness rules: "Don't impose," "Give options," and "Make A feel good—be friendly." In a later publication (p. 35) she came up with three rather different rules—"Distance," "Deference," and "Camaraderie." The focus of the maxim, "don't impose" is formality or "distance." "Give options" is the maxim of hesitancy (deference) and "being friendly" in a conversation is a sign of courtesy.

As has been noted above, [10] adopted Grice's conversational maxims in her theory of politeness. She expands on Grice's view and proposes two basic rules: be clear and be polite. [10] argued that clarity warrants that the speaker be clear in his speech and communicate his message clearly. Therefore, since Grice's conversational maxims are mainly concerned with the message communicated clearly without ambiguity, [10] subsumed them under her first principle. On the other hand, [10] claimed that politeness, which is the second principle in her theory, focuses on the social factors that govern the communication among interlocutors in a particular situation. According to [10], being polite incorporates the maxims of formality/distance, hesitancy/deference, and equality/camaraderie. As a result, these two principles may have the same effect though they are fundamentally and functionally different. For this reason, [10] made a clear distinction between them in that the first rule concerns Grice's maxims, while the second rule of politeness is classified into sub rules, which are "don't impose, give options, and make 'A' feel good and be friendly." She explains that the first sub-rule is related to the distance and formality that join participants of the same or different societies together in a certain act of communication, whilst the second considers the deference when addressing others. The last, however, concerns the addressee's feeling through interaction in that the addresser must be friendly with his addressee.

Further, the theory of Rapport Management is also explored in the study to understand school conflict resolution strategies. [8] identified such rapport strategies as change of topic, apologizing, relinquishing/accepting turns in conversation, using address terms and honorifics, and managing gestures, eye contact and other body movements. Rapport Management (RM) is a politeness framework proposed by [8] in 2000 and revised in 2008. It is one of the theories that arose due to the shortcomings of earlier theories of politeness. One of the weaknesses of earlier politeness theories that RM seeks to remedy is that theories is individual-based rather than relationship and society-based. Rapport Management considers social and contextual factors as well as cognitive notions. According to [8], RM has three main motivational bases for analyzing rapport management strategies. These are face sensitivities, social rights and obligations, and interactional goals.

Furthermore, [8] proposed a set of strategies employed to manage rapport. These rapport management strategies operate in different domains which are illocutionary domain; discourse domain; participation domain; stylistic domain; and non-verbal domain. Consequently, [8] proposed a set of factors that might affect the choice of rapport management strategies. These are orientation; contextual variables where participants and their relationships, message content, social/interactional roles, activity type, and overall assessments of context that may change during the interaction.

#### V. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Many studies abound in conflict and conflict resolution studies. For instance, [15] in a study investigated conflict between teachers and students in EFL classrooms to discover English teachers' use of threatening acts in EFL classrooms. He used classroom observation, teacher interview and students' open-ended questionnaires and discovered that teachers use more threatening behavior than students and the causes are students' unfavorable behavior and teacher's familiarity toward students among others. Although the study of [15] and the present study focus on educational institutions, they differ in population. [15] concentrated on teachers and students, while the present study is on principals of senior and junior secondary schools.

[5] studied conflict management among secondary school students to explore the history of mediation to explain essential elements of adult and peer mediation programs. He concluded that teaching of conflict management and resolution skills to students may provide them with necessary tools to solve their own conflicts productively and practically. Just like [15] and the present study, [5] also focused his study on an educational institution but it still differs significantly from the present study; it concentrates on conflict management among students while the present study focuses on language use among principals.

[9] in language, culture and conflict resolution, explored the Kiswahili language in intercultural conflict resolution. He aimed to show that a common language is one of the most

important features of a diverse community. He concluded that use of language should be considered in national and transnational conflict resolution. As can be seen, although [9] examined language and conflict resolution, his study differs from the present study in that he focused on language in intercultural conflict resolution and not on language use in conflict resolution among principals of senior and junior secondary schools as is inherent in the present study.

#### VI. METHODS

This study is a descriptive survey. [16] sees survey research as a systematic collection of data or information from a population (sometimes referred to as universe) or sample of a population (considered to be a representative of the entire group of interest), through personal interviews and/or questionnaire. This design is considered appropriate as the study collected data from the sample, with the aid of a researcher-developed questionnaire, and described an entire population under study.

The research is conducted in South East Nigeria with particular reference to the secondary schools in the region. South east is one of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The Igbo ethnic group principally occupies it. Southeast Nigeria has five (5) states – Enugu, Anambra, Ebonyi, Imo and Abia States - and these states harbor Christians, Muslims and traditional worshipers. The area of the study is comprised of all the government-owned secondary schools in the study area. Also, data were obtained from the Secondary Education Board (SEB) and the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) of the states in the Southeast to help the study. This is because the Secondary Education Board centrally controls the government-owned senior secondary schools while SUBEB controls the junior secondary schools.

The study is interested in finding out the linguistic involvement in conflicts and conflict resolution among the principals of junior and senior secondary schools in Southeast Nigeria, so the study population comprises all principals in the study area. The choice of the population is based on the fact that the existing conflict in the present school system which usually disrupts its smooth running is mostly noticed in such schools that run both junior and senior secondary schools within the same environment in Nigeria especially in the South eastern states. It is a managerial conflict since it is mostly found among junior and secondary school principals.

Due to the large number of public secondary schools in the study area, however, a proportionate representative of the population was used for effectiveness. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select 30% of the public secondary schools in the South Eastern States of Nigeria and each state in the South East formed a stratum. All the principals (both senior and junior) from the schools selected were used. In addition, regardless of the number of education zones in the different states, selections were made in three education zones from each of the states under study.

The instruments for data collection were a researcher developed principals' questionnaire entitled "Language Use in Conflict Resolution among Principals' Questionnaire" (LUCRPQ), observation as well as oral interview with structured questions. The questionnaire items were generated from data gathered from the related literature review. There were two parts in the questionnaire – Part A (which solicited information on respondents' personal data) and Part B (which contained items on the knowledge and practice of the subject under observation). Further, Part B was in three sections and the clustered items relate to the three research questions.

Face and content validity of the instrument were determined by two experts from the department of Arts Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki; and two experts from the Department of Educational Technology of the same university. Copies of the questionnaire were given to these experts and their corrections and suggestions were incorporated. As a result, the instrument possesses both content and face validity.

The reliability of the instrument was determined by pre-testing it on thirty (30) principals of English in public secondary schools in Enugu State. The scores obtained from the respondents were collated and analyzed to determine the co-efficient of the set of scores for the items in each of the sections. The Cronbach Co-Efficient Alpha was used to obtain the reliability co-efficient of 0.85, 0.82 and 0.87 respectively for sections 1, 2 and 3.

Data collected were analyzed using simple percentage and frequency count. The AGREE and STRONGLY AGREE options implied that the respondent(s) accepted the statement, while the DISAGREE and STRONGLY DISAGREE options implied that the statement was unacceptable to the respondent(s). Also, Fifty percent (50%) and above indicated acceptance while forty-nine percent (49%) and below indicated disapproval.

## VII. RESULTS

Data presented and analyzed are guided by the research questions formulated at the beginning of the study. The questionnaire items are clustered according to each research question, and analysis is done immediately afterwards. In addition, the rating scale of Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D) was applied. However, in the presentation and interpretation in this chapter, the strongly agreed and agreed options as well as the strongly disagreed and disagreed options are grouped together and the percentages are lumped together. Thus, each item has only one percentage for A/SA and D/SD. The rationale for this is to rate the agreements together and rate the rejections together for ease of analyses.

### 7.1 Research Question 1:

Does language use cause conflict among junior and senior secondary school principals?

Table 1

s/n	statements	A/SA	%	D/SD	%	Decision
1	You converse amicably with your fellow principal	404	81%	92	19%	Accept
2	You talk calmly with your fellow principal	384	77%	112	23%	Accept
3	Your fellow principal is often rude to you	336	68%	160	32%	Accept
4	You are considerate when you talk with your fellow principal	202	41%	294	59%	Reject
5	You impose your views on your fellow principal	96	19%	400	81%	Reject
6	You give your fellow principal options when you talk to them	158	32%	338	68%	Reject
7	You make your fellow principal feel good when you talk to them	171	34%	325	66%	Reject
8	You are very friendly when you talk to your fellow principal	272	55%	224	45%	Accept
9	Your fellow principal makes you feel good when you talk	182	37%	314	63%	Reject
10	Your fellow principal does not give you options when you converse	294	59%	202	41%	Accept
11	Your fellow principal imposes their views on you when you interact	361	73%	135	27%	Accept
12	You apologize to your fellow principal when you are wrong	281	57%	115	43%	Accept
13	When you talk to your fellow principal, you allow them to take turns	320	65%	176	35%	Accept
14	In conversation with your fellow principal, you talk when you should	316	64%	180	36%	Accept
15	You use polite address terms to refer to your fellow principal	277	56%	219	44%	Accept

Table 1 above presented data meant to expose the awareness of principals on impact of language use in conflict among them and their contemporaries. Available data reveal that majority of the items (10 out of 15) are accepted (A) while only 5 of the items are rejected (R). Items 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 were all accepted. Hence, the principals accept that they converse amicably with their counterparts (81%); talk calmly with one another (77%); their counterparts are often rude to them (68%); they are friendly with their colleagues (55%); their colleagues do not give them options in interaction (59%); their counterparts impose their views on them (73%); they apologize to their counterparts when wrong (57%); they allow their colleagues to take turns in interaction (65%); they take/relinquish turns appropriately (64%); and they use polite address terms to refer to their contemporaries (56%). On the other hand, items 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9 were rejected. In other words, principals reject that they are considerate when they talk with their fellow principal (59%); that they impose their views on their counterparts (81%); that they give options to their counterparts when they talk (68%); that they make their counterparts feel good when conversing

with them (66%); and that their contemporaries make them feel good in interaction (63%).

### 7.2 Research Question 2:

What is the place of language use in conflict resolution among junior and senior secondary school principals?

Table 2

s/n	statements	A/SA	%	D/SD	%	Decision
16	Antagonism from your fellow principal makes you angry	392	79%	104	21%	Accept
17	Insults from your fellow principal makes you want to retaliate	472	95%	24	5%	Accept
18	When you shout at your fellow principal, he shouts back	480	97%	16	3%	Accept
19	Referring to your fellow principal with address terms creates conflict	29	6%	467	94%	Reject
20	Harmony is achieved when you talk with consideration with your fellow principal	366	74%	130	26%	Accept
21	Taking/relinquishing turns in speech promotes peaceful conversations	275	55%	221	45%	Accept
22	Refusing to allow others to take turn in conversation create conflict	281	57%	215	43%	Accept
23	Refusal to apologize when wrong brings peace	6	1%	490	99%	Reject
24	Apologizing when wrong creates good relationship	492	99%	4	1%	Accept

Table 2 presented data which sought to uncover principals' views about the place of language use in conflicts among them and their contemporaries in Southeast Nigeria. Data reveal that majority of the items were accepted. Out of the 9 items, only 2 (items 19 and 23) were rejected and those were intentionally stated in negation. By implication, items 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, and 24 were accepted. Hence, the principals agreed that antagonism from their fellow principals makes them angry (79%); insults from their fellow principals make them want to retaliate (95%); when they shout at their fellow principals, they shout back (97%); harmony is achieved when they talk with consideration to their fellow principals (74%); taking/relinquishing turns in speech promotes peaceful conversations (55%); refusing to allow others to take turn in conversation create conflict (57%); apologizing when wrong creates good relationship (99%). In contrast, the principals rejected the statements that referring to their fellow principals with address terms creates conflict (94%); and refusal to apologize when wrong brings peace (99%).

### 7.3 Research Question 3:

What pragmatic and rapport management strategies can be used to redress conflicts among junior and senior secondary school principals?

Table 3

s/n	statements	A/SA	%	D/SD	%	Decision
25	Apologizing when wrong	204	41%	292	59%	Reject
26	Changing to a more pleasant topic	212	43%	284	57%	Reject
27	Avoid imposing my opinions on others	273	55%	223	45%	Accept
28	Giving options to others when we talk	256	52%	240	48%	Accept
29	Make others feel good	321	65%	175	35%	Accept
30	Relinquish/accept turns in conversations	268	54%	228	46%	Accept
31	Use polite address terms when referring to others	299	60%	197	40%	Accept

Table 3 above presented data on research question 3 which elicited information on strategies employed by principals in Southeast Nigeria to redress conflicts. The statements proffered were based on strategies to adopt in order to avoid conflict as well as strategies to apply in order to reduce or minimize conflict. A vast majority of the respondents accepted the strategies meant to avoid conflict and rejected those meant to minimize conflict. Hence, items 27, 28, 29, 30, and 31 were all accepted while items 25 and 26 were both rejected. Further, the principals accepted that they avoid imposing their opinions on others (55%); give options to others when they talk (52%); make others feel good in conversations (65%); relinquish/accept turns in conversations (54%); use polite address terms when referring to others (60%). Conversely, the principals say that they neither apologize when wrong (59%); nor change to a more pleasant topic when the ensuing one is generating conflict (57%).

## VIII. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first research questions sought information on principals' awareness on the impact of language use in conflict among them and their contemporaries. From data presented, the principals are aware that in order to maintain peace in their workplace, they need to, converse amicably with their counterparts (81%); talk calmly with one another (77%); their counterparts are often rude to them (68%); they are friendly with their colleagues (55%); their colleagues do not give them options in interaction (59%); their counterparts impose their views on them (73%); they apologize to their counterparts when wrong (57%); they allow their colleagues to take turns in interaction (65%); they take/relinquish turns appropriately (64%); and they use polite address terms to refer to their contemporaries (56%). The principals' awareness, however, is not a guarantee of applying rapport management strategies in communicative situations.

From the rejected statements (items 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9), it was discovered that, principals reject that they are considerate when they talk with their fellow principal (59%); that they impose their views on their counterparts (81%); that they give options to their counterparts when they talk (68%); that they make their counterparts feel good when conversing with them

(66%); and that their contemporaries make them feel good in interaction (63%).

Research question 2 sought to find out principals' views about the place of language use in conflicts among them and their contemporaries in Southeast Nigeria. 79% of the respondents agreed that antagonism from their fellow principals makes them angry; 95% say that insults from their fellow principals make them want to retaliate; 97% aver that when they shout at their fellow principals, they shout back; 74% agree that harmony is achieved when they talk with consideration to their fellow principals; 55% accept that taking/relinquishing turns in speech promotes peaceful conversations; 57% see refusing to allow others to take turn in conversation as a source of conflict; 99% agree that apologizing when wrong creates good relationship.

Further, 94% of the principals sampled rejected the statements that referring to their fellow principals with address terms creates conflict. This indicates that the principals understand the place of proper language use in interaction. Also, 99% rejected the statement that refusal to apologize when wrong brings peace. By implication, the respondents are aware that apology when wrong, helps minimize conflicts in interaction.

Research question 3 elicited information on strategies employed by principals in Southeast Nigeria to redress conflicts. In line with the politeness model of [9] that supports a withdrawal of imposition to interlocutors, the data reveal that 55% of the principals sampled avoid imposing their opinions on others; 52% of the respondents give options to others when they talk; 65% make others feel good in conversations; relinquish/accept turns in conversations (54%); use polite address terms when referring to others (60%). These strategies agree with the aversion of [10] that conflicts can be avoided in interaction when interactants 'Don't Impose,' 'Give Options,' and 'Make A feel good.' However, these strategies are more avoidance-based and will not help a conflict situation that has already ensued.

On strategies for reducing conflict, 59% of the principals in the study area say that they never apologize when wrong; 57% of the respondents reject that they change to a more pleasant topic when the ensuing one is generating conflict. The foregoing shows that principals in the Southeast adopt strategies for avoiding conflict more that they apply strategies to minimize conflict. This is completely against the view of [8] which supports the application of strategies that minimize conflict even during a conflict.

## IX. CONCLUSION

The study assessed the impacts of language use in conflict and conflict resolution among senior and junior secondary school principals in Southeast Nigeria. Despite the importance of peaceful coexistence in the secondary school system, it is appalling that effort is not made to ensure that rapport management strategies are encouraged among the leadership of Nigerian secondary schools. Indeed, the principals in the study area converse calmly and amicably with their

counterparts, but there is no evidence that they show consideration for the feelings of their counterparts in interaction. However, findings show that the principals know that polite language is crucial in maintaining a cordial relationship.

Furthermore, findings reveal that principals in South East Nigeria prefer to apply strategies for avoiding conflict than those meant to minimize a conflict that has ensued. This implies that a conflict can escalate and destroy relationships and harmony at the workplace, with nobody trying to contain it.

## X. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made.

- In addition to conversing calmly and amicably with their counterparts, principals in the study area must begin to show consideration for the feelings of their counterparts in interaction.
- Awareness of the importance of the use of polite language in maintaining a cordial relationship is not enough. Principals in the study area must begin to use approaches that will create a harmonious working environment.
- Strategies for avoiding conflict are as important as those meant for minimizing conflict after it has ensued. Hence, principals must apply strategies for both avoidance and minimizing of conflicts in secondary schools in South East Nigeria.

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