Managing Conflicts in Challenged Student's Classrooms in Osun, Nigeria

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Abstract: The management of conflicts in school organization is one of the major tasks facing teachers today. The true skill of a teacher lies in finding a sound balance between teaching (pedagogy) and service (management). This study was primarily focused on challenged children classroom settings. The objectives were to determine the Nigerian societal perspectives towards challenged children. It also sought to identify the common conflicts observable among Nigerian challenged learning population. It further investigated the management strategies employed by teachers in challenged children classrooms. These were with a view to integrate challenged children into the society with good attitude causing least conflicts. A survey research design was adopted. All the inclusive practicing schools in Osun State, Nigeria made the population. Two complete basic special schools — one public, one private — were randomly assigned to the study from each of the three senatorial districts of the state with five special education trained teachers per school snowball sampled; five helpers of the teachers having direct relation with the learners were randomly assigned to the study. Two research instruments were used. An interview guide dubbed "Common Crises among Them (CCT)" and a questionnaire titled "Societal Perception and Conflict Situations Management among Challenged School Children (SPCM)". The CCT and the SPCM were adapted from a previous work of Turoti (2016), an unpublished dissertation. Data collected were analyzed using percentages. The Nigerian society's perception of challenged Nigerian child is changing from views of waste, beggarly and liability to fellowmen with weaknesses and in need of additional care and integration. The study also found that every observable challenges have conflicts not necessary peculiar as they cut across one another. The management strategies employed by teachers of challenged learners in Nigerian basic schools notably was at varying degrees. The study concluded that Nigerians perception of challenged population is improving. It established that dissonance, resistance, withdrawal and other conflicts were not peculiar to challenged population. Study elucidated that personal encounter is prominently adopted by teachers and helpers in resolving conflict situations. Further investigations however would establish the interdependence of these and other classroom management strategies towards ensuring zero conflict and optimal functional classroom for the challenged population.

Key words: conflicts, challenged, series, perception, strategies

1. Introduction

Conflicts are inevitable in human relationships. According to Shindler (2008), conflict is a natural part of any functional class which is not necessarily a sign that there are problems with the classroom management or with the

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health of the classroom community. But it does often lead to unhappiness, discomfort, and or the need for members of the class to emotionally withdraw or attack. It is a situation in which two or more people, groups, nations are entangled in opposing ideas, feelings, wishes, believes, values, goals or desires which result in arguments, disagreement and differing, disuniting opinions for esteem, correctness and control. Wilmot & Hocker (2011) identified struggle, sense of interdependence, affective and differences between two or more individuals as four elements that indicate conflict in any given situation.

It is inherent in every human to feel loved, recognized, heard and appreciated. A threat to any of these states of nature poses threat from within — intrapersonal; and when such threat is rooted from other people, group, organization, communities or culture — interpersonal; they result in conflict situations requiring management. While intrapersonal conflict according to Nelson & Quick (2006) can be managed with careful self-analysis and diagnosis of the situation (intra psychic process); interpersonal conflicts — student–student, student-teacher cannot be exempted from the many sources of conflict generation hence, conflict needs pluralized personality to own problem.

Conflict whether intrapersonal, interpersonal or externally inflicted, when examined with a sufficient amount of awareness, can be a useful means to personal and collective growth. It is therefore not exclusively on negative connotation rather, learners need perceive conflict situation as opportunity to grow rather than source of grief. Therefore, the teachers' job is not done until his pupils can make sense of conflict and are provided with the skills, knowledge and dispositions to process it effectively with a view to creating a functional classroom.

Like every other human, challenged children have goals and ambitions but more than anyone else could feel insecure and afraid due condition(s), environment or the society. Literature (Adima, Ladipo & Abosi, 1981; Akinrinade, 2003; Wilmot & Hocker, 2011) abounds with definitions, descriptions and situations of conflicts between nations, cities, persons and so on. Nigeria is however found bereft of adequate thoughts given to classroom conflict situations among challenged individuals though engaged in interaction with themselves, with other people and definitely encounter with interpersonal conflicts.

Theory of interpersonal conflict handling styles can be traced to Follet (1940) cited in Enact (2014) who proposed three ways of dealing with conflict: domination, compromise and integration. This idea has been modified by various researchers but, in the opinion of Rahim & Bonoma (1979) based on previous studies had proposed the differentiation of five interpersonal conflict management styles into two dimensions: concern for self and concern for others. The dimension of concern for self explains the intention of how the person tries to satisfy his own concerns which explains the degree of high or low concern for self-outcomes in a teaching-learning situation and; on the other hand the dimension of concern for others wherein the teacher obviously wants to satisfy others concerns, in this stance, his pupil's (challenged or otherwise) outcomes. This theory applies adequately to ensuring the end product of schooling for challenged learning population though the many conflicts bewildering them more than their unchallenged contemporaries.

Nigeria, in a report (Leadership Newspaper, Jan. 18th, 2017) has about 25 million of her citizens challenged in one form or another with 14 percent having significant difficulties in functioning. It is no gainsay that, the number of challenged population are child-locked, out-of-school and treated on charity basis rather than rights. However, this study probes into the societal perception of challenged children in Nigeria; it determines the forms of conflicts among challenged learners in the basic schools and; peers into the management strategies employed by teachers. These are with a view to conscientize the society of conflict situation among the challenged and improve the learning environment to ameliorate negative recurrence of conflicts.

2. Methodology

The survey research design was adopted for the study. This provided adequate sample representation of the population such that, standard error is minimal. The availability of various schools for challenged children (public or private) in Osun State, Nigeria makes it adequate location for the study. The study population consisted all special and inclusive practicing primary and secondary schools in Osun State. Two complete basic special schools —— one public, one private — were randomly assigned to the study from each of the three senatorial districts of the state. In each school, five teachers possessing Special Education qualification directly involved in teaching and advisory role with learners are multi-staged sampled; five helpers of the teachers having direct relation with the learners were randomly assigned to the study. Two research instruments were used. An interview guide dubbed "Common Crises among Them (CCT)" and a questionnaire titled "Societal Perception and Conflict Situations Management among Challenged School Children (SPCM)". The CCT and the SPCM were validated and reliable instruments adapted from a previous work of Turoti (2016), an unpublished dissertation. Data collected were analyzed using percentages.

3. Results

The descriptive analysis was performed in order to present exact respondents perceptions on their application of managerial theory in classroom conflict situations especially with challenged children at four levels of Likert scale. The four levels were defined in the research instrument as (1) "Strongly Disagree", (2) "Disagree", (3) "Agree", and (4) "Strongly Agree". In order to analyze the respondent's view, the percentage scores of each questionnaire item for each conception were determined. The result of the first objective investigated is as presented in Table 1.

Table 1　Perception of Challenged Children by Nigerian Population

Conceptions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Burdensome	4	36	**42**	18
Emotionally Unbalanced	8	26	**54**	12
Beggars	**36**	34	22	8
Waste	**46**	32	14	8
Liability	16	**41**	31	12
Unworthy of human status	**48**	30	18	4
Second class	**47**	21	21	12
Culture frowns	34	**36**	15	15
Financial drain	22	**58**	10	10
Socially discriminated	10	40	**46**	4

The societal perception of challenged Nigerian child is not of waste, beggarly, uncultured, unworthy, second class liability. Yet, many view the challenged as burdensome and source of emotional imbalance, discrimination against the challenged population hangs in the balance. This portrays improved societal appreciation for the challenged against the pervasive stories of inhuman treatment. A graphical representation of the responses revealed in radar format the delineation of respondent's viewpoints in Figure 1. The responses were dubbed series. Series 1 represents strongly disagree, series 2, 3, and 4 then followed to represent disagree, agree and strongly

agree respectively. The conceptions tested for were webbed around and the radar for each series graphically represents the strength and weaknesses as perceived by respondents.
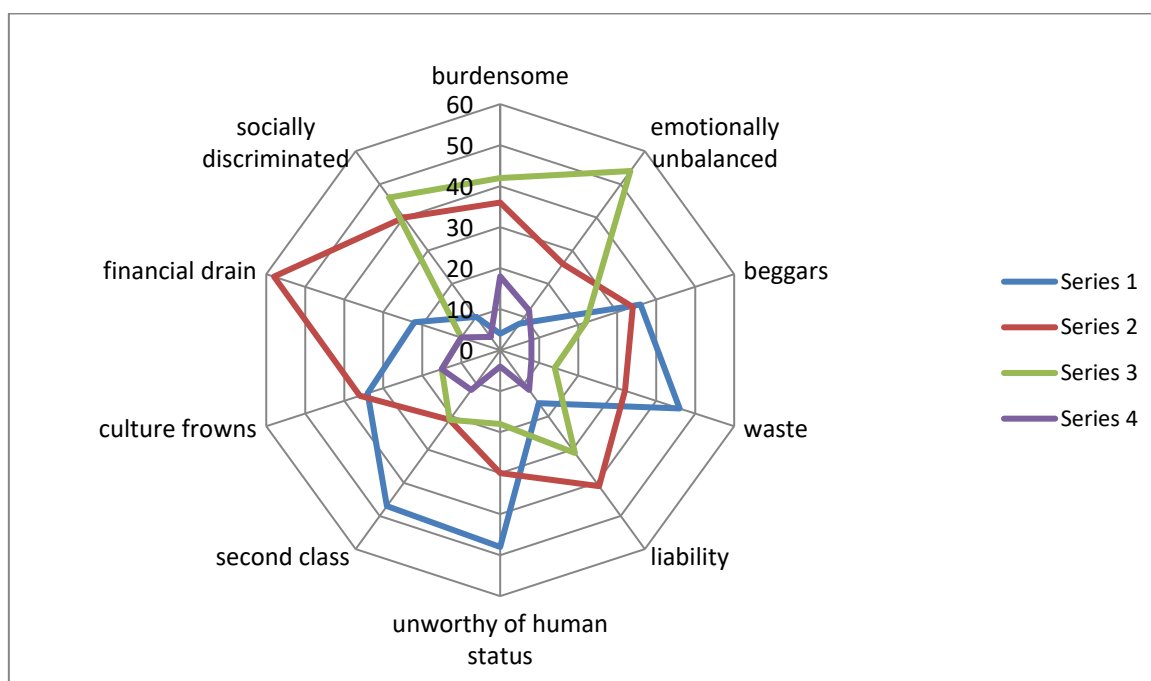

Figure 1   The Main Society's Perception of Challenged Children in Nigeria

The second objective examined in this study is the forms of conflicts that are peculiar to and observable among challenged learners in Nigeria basic schools across the study population. The study established the most common disabilities within the study population and rated the occurrences of each of these within the sampled population on simple frequency calculation. Responses however depict the lineage of conflict experienced within the individual challenges. This is presented in Table 2.

Table 2   Observable Challenges and Peculiar Conflicts

Disability	f_x	Conflict Experienced
Hearing Impaired	8	Dissonance; Ridicule; Dejection
Visual Impairment	2	Resistance; Neglect; Dejection
Speech Impaired	4	Dissonance; Ridicule; Suicide
Emotional Disable	2	Withdrawal; Depression; Suicide
Mental Retard	3	Invisibility; Uncertainty; Resistance
Physical Disability	8	Ridicule; Neglect; Dejection
Multiple Disability	4	Withdrawal; Neglect; Suicide
Learning Disorder	6	Inferiority; Withdrawal; Dejection
Attention Deficit	7	Silent treatment; Resistance; Neglect
Down Syndrome	2	Inferiority; Invisibility; Depression
Hydrocephaly	4	Silent treatment; Neglect; Depression
Cerebral Palsy	2	Uncertainty; Inferiority; Withdrawal
Autistic	0	N/A
Congenital D-B	0	N/A

The Figure 2 represents the observable challenges and peculiar conflicts graphically with a view to exhibit the frequency of the disabilities within the sampled population and establish that, there is no disability without conflict(s) experienced as reflected on the x axis on the graph. The autistic and congenital deaf-blindedness not represented was also null at experiencing conflicts.
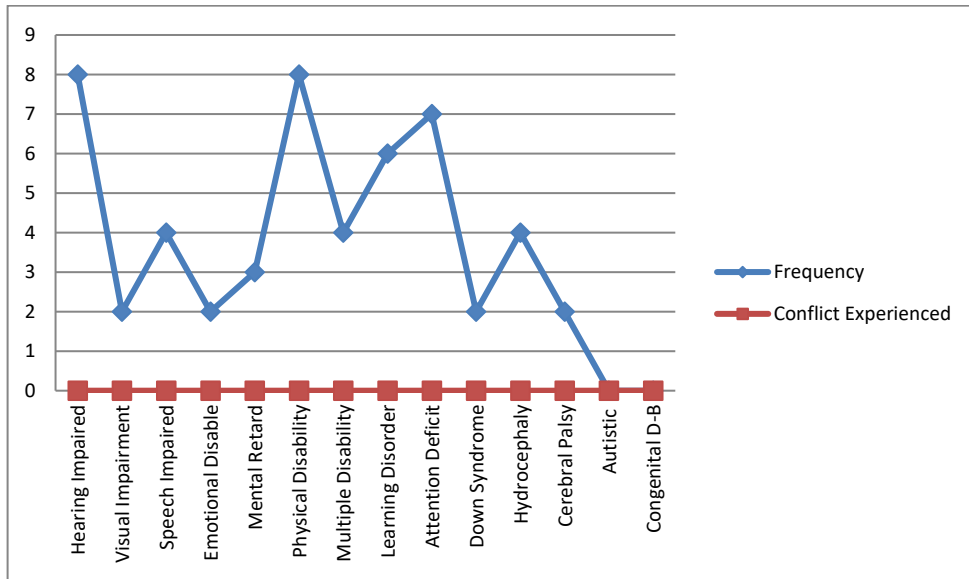

Figure 2   Chart Showing Disability Frequency and Conflict Experienced

The management strategies employed by teachers of challenged learners in Nigerian basic schools within the study population was the final objective investigated in this study. Figure 3 depicts eight different management strategies in tandem with Follet (1940) and Rahim and Bonoma (1979) opinions. The application rate of each were rated and represented with a bar-chart. Clearly, private encounter was mostly adopted. Reward, self-regulation and making the learners feel accountable for their dos and failures engendering conflict(s) were other prominent management styles. It is notable that there is no strategy of the eight untouched by the teachers. Further investigations however need to establish the interdependence of these and other classroom management strategies in ensuring zero conflict and optimal functional classroom for the challenged population.
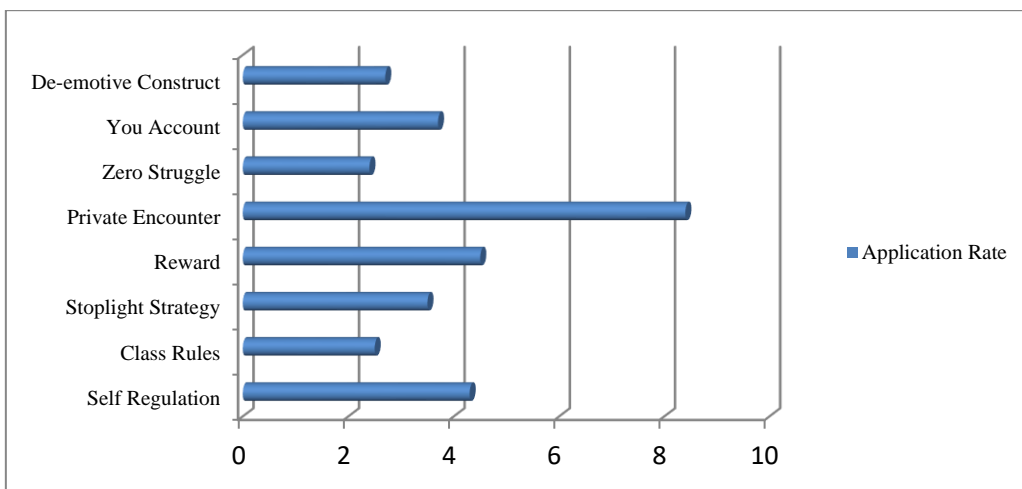

Figure 3   Management Strategies Cum Application

4. Discussions

The study reveals Nigerians perception of challenged population. It indicated improvement over the long held mythic, disillusioning thought of burdensome; emotionally imbalanced; discriminated against and parasitic benefactors. It reiterated that, the Nigerian populations of challenged citizens are on the rise considering the frequency of same within the study population. This agrees with Smith (2011) investigation of face of disability in Nigeria. His study investigated the demographic characteristics of people with disabilities, understanding of disability and their health-seeking behavior. Except his restrictiveness to three most common disabilities, there were agreements in the findings.

Study also affirms dissonance, resistance, withdrawal, ridicule, silent treatment and other conflicts as common to all disability learners' groups leading to dejection, depression and suicidal attempts among other terrible penalty. Agaliotis and Goudiras (2004) studied children with learning difficulties. They found that challenged children experience more difficulty than children of typical development in appreciating the components which make up the context of interpersonal conflict. Bakhshia, Babulalb and Trani (2018) also found the education of children with disabilities besieged with conflict and post-conflict situations in specific environment.

Neely (2005) studied conflicts resolution techniques adopted by school personnel and parents of children with disabilities in Virginia USA to understand better how these conflicts might be managed and recommend its implications for managing special education conflicts at the school building level. She established that conflicts could be managed successfully if school personnel provide parents with clear evidences that their child's IEP was being followed in the classroom; that accommodations were provided; that staff were knowledgeable about providing services in an inclusive environment; that administrators were knowledgeable about special education compliance issues; and that staff would be held accountable for providing an appropriate education and for demonstrating trustworthy behavior. This study has further elucidated on management strategies employed in teaching-learning situations. It pinpointed that personal encounter is prominently adopted by teachers and helpers in resolving conflict situations in the classroom among challenged learners in Osun, Nigeria. In addition, the application of class rules and zero struggles on the part of teachers were least among the strategies for conflict resolution.

5. Conclusion

The first step towards scientific resolution of any problem is the identification of the problem. This is what this study has executed in resolving classroom conflicts peculiar to special need learners. If the entire humanity's interaction generates conflicts, the interaction within challenged individuals in teaching-learning situation and, between them and their unchallenged contemporaries will surely not be exempted.

The study concludes that, challenged Nigerian populations are on the rise and the societal perception of the challenged population is on the improvement curve. Though conflicts either intra or inter, they are being managed strategically via personal encounter among other strategies.

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