



# Innovative Conflict Management by Principals: Enhancing Teachers' Job Performance in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This study investigated how principals' innovative conflict management strategies enhanced teachers' job performance across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, addressing leadership challenges in diverse urban and rural secondary schools. A mixed-methods design was employed, targeting 30 teachers and 10 principals from 10 schools per zone (5 urban, 5 rural), which totaled 1,800 teachers and 30 principals. Teacher surveys, administered via Google Forms, assessed the impact of principals' strategies, while semi-structured principal interviews, conducted via Zoom or WhatsApp, explored innovative practices. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations analyzed the survey data, and thematic analysis examined the interview insights. The results revealed that collaborative strategies had strong positive correlations with job satisfaction ( $r = 0.58, p < 0.01$ ) and teaching quality ( $r = 0.62, p < 0.01$ ). Mediation and integration strategies showed strong positive correlations with discipline maintenance ( $r = 0.50, p < 0.01$ ). In contrast, avoidance strategies demonstrated a strong negative correlation with absenteeism ( $r = -0.45, p < 0.01$ ), indicating they increased teacher absences, particularly in North-East rural schools. The adoption of digital tools reduced conflict resolution times, though rural areas faced significant connectivity challenges. The study concluded that adaptive, innovative conflict management strengthens teacher effectiveness and school stability. Based on the findings, study recommended the implementation of zone-specific training programs, the integration of digital conflict resolution tools, policy frameworks for rural support, and the promotion of collaborative leadership to enhance teacher performance and school stability.

**Keywords:** Conflict management, principals' strategies, teachers' performance, collaboration, mediation, integration, avoidance, job satisfaction, teaching quality, discipline maintenance, absenteeism, Nigeria, geopolitical zones.

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## 1. Introduction

Education is a key foundation for personal growth and societal progress in Nigeria, which provide essential knowledge, practical skills, and values that help individuals handle the challenges of modern life across its diverse geopolitical zones. Rahim (2011) stressed that education builds critical thinking and emotional strength, equipping students with tools to navigate complex situations, while Saif et al. (2012) pointed out its role in fostering community harmony and driving economic growth through skilled workers. In Nigeria, where

secondary schools face conflicts due to cultural differences and uneven resource distribution between areas like the North-East and South-West, effective leadership is crucial to maintain educational quality and ensure consistent learning opportunities. Ogodor et al. (2024) highlighted how these disputes disrupt classroom activities, and Ughamadu et al. (2025) noted their impact on teacher morale, with Farooqi et al. (2023) emphasizing resource gaps as a key trigger. Finegan (2012) explained that unresolved disputes lower teacher morale by creating stress, and Powell and Maoz (2014) observed similar issues in diverse settings, showing the need for principals to use smart conflict management to

restore stability. Saduman (2010) added that ongoing conflicts disrupt teaching routines by diverting focus from lessons, a problem Edet et al. (2017) observed in Akwa Ibom, where poor resolution hurt performance and student outcomes. Owan (2018) highlighted regional impacts on school climate, and Thote and Gowri (2021) linked poor management to job dissatisfaction, while Uchendu et al. (2018) and Ogodor & Ibiam (2024) emphasized the urgent need for better strategies to support educators. This clear overview shows that principals' innovative approaches can reduce disruptions, support teachers in delivering quality education, and strengthen schools across Nigeria's varied urban and rural areas by fostering a positive learning environment.

Collaborative conflict management strategies, a main focus of this study, involve principals bringing teachers and staff together to solve disputes through open talks and shared responsibility, which boosts teachers' commitment to their work and improves school harmony. Nelson and Quick (2019) described how this builds trust by including everyone in decisions, creating a sense of ownership among educators, a finding Ogodor and Ibiam (2024) supported with a positive correlation ( $r=0.55$ ) in South South schools, where teamwork improved student results and teacher morale. Farooqi et al. (2023) found collaboration improved job performance in public schools by reducing tension, matching Richards (2012), who showed it reduces loneliness in diverse teams through mutual support. Rahim (2011) saw collaboration as caring for both sides, ensuring fair outcomes, a view Owan (2018) confirmed in Cross River by reducing personal conflicts and enhancing cooperation. Thote and Gowri (2021) measured its effect with a beta of 0.45 on teacher success, showing better classroom engagement, and Ughamadu et al. (2025) reported  $r=0.612$  in Anambra, highlighting urban benefits due to better resources. Uchendu et al. (2018) noted a better school climate from teamwork, while Kazimoto (2013) and Havenga et al. (2011) praised its role in building unity, and Ogodor et al. (2024) added its importance in maintaining school focus. These combined insights prove collaboration helps bridge cultural gaps in Nigeria's zones, like North-Central, by encouraging teamwork that keeps teaching focused and schools united, leading to stronger educational outcomes.

Mediation strategies, another key area, involve principals acting as neutral helpers to guide teachers through disputes, finding fair solutions that rebuild trust and maintain peace in the school environment. Havenga et al. (2011) explained that mediation uses empathy to calm tensions, creating a safe space for discussion, which Ogodor et al. (2024) linked to better discipline ( $r=0.774$ ) in unity schools by addressing root issues like resource sharing and workload disputes. Kazimoto (2013) suggested mediation works well in group settings by promoting understanding and reducing hostility, a point Farooqi et al. (2023) backed with evidence of improved

conflict handling through structured talks that included teacher input on curriculum challenges. Rahim (2011) viewed mediation as balancing everyone's needs to ensure fairness, and Edet et al. (2017) showed it improved supervision in Akwa Ibom through neutral discussions that clarified roles and reduced misunderstandings over duties. Ughamadu et al. (2025) found  $r=0.612$  in Anambra, indicating better classroom management and fewer disciplinary issues, and Owan (2018) noted fewer disruptions in Cross River with mediated sessions that restored harmony by addressing personal grievances. Thote and Gowri (2021) added that it boosts effectiveness by reducing stress and improving teacher-student relationships, while Uchendu et al. (2018) and Powell & Maoz (2014) highlighted its fairness in diverse settings, and Pokalova (2015) and Ogodor & Ibiam (2024) emphasized its role in rural areas to prevent escalation of conflicts over limited facilities. This shows mediation helps with task-related conflicts in Nigeria's North-Central, preventing bigger problems and supporting steady work by fostering a cooperative atmosphere that benefits both staff and students.

Integration strategies, an important variable, mean principals bring together different ideas to create solutions that work for everyone, encouraging new ways to handle school issues and improve overall function. Powell and Maoz (2014) said integration suits tough disputes by finding common ground, such as aligning teaching methods with administrative policies, and Ogodor and Ibiam (2024) found it lifted performance ( $r=0.55$ ) in South South by matching school goals with teaching needs through joint planning on resource use. Farooqi et al. (2023) reported  $r=0.43$  in urban areas, showing better results from combined efforts to address classroom overcrowding, aligning with Rahim (2011), who saw it as a win-win approach that benefits all through shared decision-making. Ughamadu et al. (2025) noted  $r=0.612$  in Anambra for better organization through unified strategies on curriculum updates, while Thote and Gowri (2021) found  $\beta=0.45$  for job benefits by enhancing teamwork on professional development. Owan (2018) showed it cut turnover in Cross River by aligning staff goals with school objectives, reducing friction over workload, and Uchendu et al. (2018) praised its team-building effects in creating a supportive culture for handling policy changes. Kazimoto (2013) and Havenga et al. (2011) supported its creativity in problem-solving, such as innovative scheduling, while Ghaffar (2019) and Edet et al. (2017) highlighted its impact on policy conflicts, like resolving disputes over exam schedules. This mix of evidence highlights integration's value in Nigeria, especially for policy conflicts in South-East zones, where it builds lasting harmony and practical improvements by uniting diverse perspectives on educational priorities.

Additionally, avoidance strategies involve principals choosing to delay dealing with conflicts, hoping they fade away, but this can lead to bigger problems if not

handled carefully, affecting school stability and teacher well-being. Ghaffar (2019) warned that avoiding issues too often harms schools by letting tensions grow, such as unresolved arguments over classroom assignments, and Farooqi et al. (2023) found it hurt performance ( $r=-0.41$ ) by leaving problems unsolved, causing frustration and disengagement. Owan (2018) saw avoidance worsen results in Cross River by delaying solutions to disputes over teaching hours, matching Kim (2012), who linked it to less engagement among staff due to ignored concerns. Rahim (2011) called it a low-effort choice that avoids confrontation, risking escalation, and Ughamadu et al. (2025) found weak links in Anambra due to neglected issues like resource allocation. Thote and Gowri (2021) noted its negative impact on teachers by increasing stress from unaddressed grievances, and Ogodor et al. (2024) reported  $r=-0.38$  in unity schools from unresolved disputes over duty rosters. Uchendu et al. (2018) connected it to more absenteeism, as teachers felt unsupported, while Sheryl (2017) and Saduman (2010) noted stress buildup from prolonged tension, and Havenga et al. (2011) and Edet et al. (2017) emphasized its risks to school morale, particularly in understaffed areas. This shows avoidance needs careful use in Nigeria's North-East rural areas to avoid missing chances to fix problems, ensuring a healthier work environment by addressing issues like lack of materials before they worsen.

Job satisfaction, a key measure of performance, reflects how happy teachers feel with their jobs, shaped by principals resolving conflicts in ways that value their efforts and ease workplace stress, leading to a more dedicated workforce. Idris (2016) described satisfaction as including recognition for hard work and growth opportunities, such as training programs, which Ogodor and Ibiam (2024) tied to strategies with  $r=0.55$  in South South, boosting morale through support during timetable disputes. Saif et al. (2012) explored its cultural sides, showing how appreciation from fair conflict resolution affects happiness, and Neck and Manz (2017) linked it to personal leadership that enhances well-being by encouraging self-management. Farooqi et al. (2023) saw positive effects from management practices like regular feedback, and Thote and Gowri (2021) found  $\beta=0.45$ , indicating better job attitudes from reduced tension. Owan (2018) noted strategy benefits in Cross River by cutting stress over resource sharing, while Ughamadu et al. (2025) reported  $r=0.612$ , reflecting urban advantages from better support systems. Uchendu et al. (2018) highlighted better morale from resolved issues like workload conflicts, and Rahim (2011) and Taherdoost (2016) stressed support systems, such as peer mentoring, with Edet et al. (2017) adding retention value through stability in crisis situations. Together, these findings show satisfaction keeps teachers committed in Nigeria, lowering turnover across zones by creating a supportive atmosphere that encourages long-term service and reduces burnout from unresolved disputes.

Teaching quality, another performance factor, measures how well teachers deliver lessons, improved by conflict resolutions that let them focus on teaching and connect with students, resulting in stronger educational outcomes. Saif et al. (2012) looked at quality's cultural roots, showing its link to teaching methods tailored to local needs, and Ogodor et al. (2024) linked it to strategies with  $r=0.774$  in unity schools, enhancing lesson delivery through resolved disputes over teaching aids. Farooqi et al. (2023) found better results in urban areas from clear focus on curriculum goals, matching Salleh and Adulpakdee (2012), who studied methods in similar settings with positive effects on student participation. Thote and Gowri (2021) tied it to job success through effective teaching strategies, like interactive lessons, and Ughamadu et al. (2025) noted  $r=0.612$ , indicating skill improvement from reduced classroom tension. Owan (2018) saw improvements in Cross River from resolved disputes over class sizes, while Saduman (2010) and Havenga et al. (2011) emphasized focus on students through clear priorities, and Rahim (2011) and Edet et al. (2017) highlighted student gains from quality teaching, such as higher test scores. This shows solving disputes boosts teaching skills in Nigeria's South-West, where clear focus leads to better student outcomes and a more engaged classroom, enhancing overall learning experiences.

Mores so, discipline maintenance, a vital performance aspect, involves teachers keeping order in class, supported by principals who show fair conflict handling that sets a good example, fostering a respectful learning space for all. Havenga et al. (2011) noted its importance across groups in maintaining rules through consistent behavior modeling, and Farooqi et al. (2023) connected it to strategy use for consistent classroom control during disputes. Ogodor and Ibiam (2024) found a link with  $r=0.55$ , showing better control over student behavior, while Saduman (2010) studied its role in creating order in schools by reducing chaos from conflicts. Thote and Gowri (2021) linked it to job roles through clear expectations, such as uniform enforcement, and Ughamadu et al. (2025) reported  $r=0.612$ , reflecting discipline strength from resolved staff disagreements. Owan (2018) saw fewer disruptions in Cross River from fair handling of teacher-student conflicts, while Uchendu et al. (2018) and Ghaffar (2019) stressed order's value in preventing bullying, and Rahim (2011) and Edet et al. (2017) noted calm classrooms from good management, enhancing focus on lessons. This proves good conflict management helps teachers maintain rules in Nigeria's North-Central, creating a calm learning space that benefits students and staff alike by minimizing distractions and fostering respect.

Absenteeism, a performance indicator, tracks how often teachers miss work due to unresolved conflicts that cause stress and disconnection, disrupting school routines and student progress across the academic year. Sheryl (2017) looked at its causes, such as tension from disputes over

schedules, and Farooqi et al. (2023) found a negative link ( $r=-0.41$ ), showing its impact on attendance and lesson continuity. Owan (2018) tied it to strategies in Cross River, where poor handling increased absences during peak exam periods, and Taherdoost (2016) checked measurement tools for accuracy in tracking these patterns. Thote and Gowri (2021) noted its downsides, like lost teaching time affecting syllabus coverage, while Ughamadu et al. (2025) found weak connections to management efforts, such as ignoring complaints about facilities. Ogodor et al. (2024) reported  $r=-0.38$ , indicating a rise in missed days during rainy seasons, while Havenga et al. (2011) and Saduman (2010) linked it to stress from unaddressed workload issues, and Rahim (2011) and Edet et al. (2017) noted its effect on learning, causing gaps in student understanding. This shows absenteeism's rise in Nigeria's rural North-East, where delayed fixes worsen the problem and disrupt learning, requiring timely interventions to maintain stability and ensure consistent education delivery.

The need for this study comes from the urgent requirement to address ongoing weaknesses in Nigeria's secondary education. In Nigeria's secondary schools, persistent conflicts among teachers and between principals and staff, driven by cultural diversity, resource disparities, and administrative challenges across geopolitical zones. These conflicts have significantly undermined teachers' job performance, leading to reduced teaching quality, increased absenteeism, and declining discipline maintenance that disrupt student learning. Edet et al. (2017) found in Akwa Ibom that poor conflict resolution strategies correlated with lower effectiveness, while Owan (2018) reported in Cross River that avoidance tactics negatively impacted teacher morale, and Uchendu et al. (2018) noted in their study that organizational performance improved with better management, yet these investigations remained regionally limited. Despite these insights, a critical gap persists due to the lack of a comprehensive, nationwide analysis that addresses urban-rural variations and incorporates modern tools like digital mediation, leaving unresolved the full scope of conflict impacts across Nigeria's diverse educational settings. This study intends to fill this gap by conducting a mixed-methods investigation across all six geopolitical zones, utilizing surveys and interviews to assess principals' innovative conflict management strategies and their effects on job satisfaction, teaching quality, discipline maintenance, and absenteeism, thereby providing evidence-based solutions to enhance teacher performance and educational outcomes nationwide.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Assess the influence of principals' collaborative strategies on teachers' job satisfaction and teaching quality.
2. Examine the impact of mediation and integration strategies on discipline maintenance and supervision of academic activities.

3. Evaluate the relationship between avoidance strategies and absenteeism rates.
4. Identify digital-supported innovations in conflict management for zone-specific performance improvements.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Conflict Management in Educational Settings

Conflict management in educational settings refers to the structured efforts by principals to identify, address, and resolve disputes among teachers, staff, and sometimes students, ensuring a productive school environment where teaching and learning can continue smoothly without interruptions. Rahim (2011) outlined that effective management transforms disputes into opportunities for growth by encouraging dialogue, a perspective Ogodor et al. (2024) reinforced by demonstrating its positive effect on discipline in unity schools, where structured talks reduced classroom chaos. Kazimoto (2013) explored how these strategies, such as regular meetings, reduce tension in group dynamics by fostering mutual respect, while Farooqi et al. (2023) found that proactive handling, including timely interventions, improved teacher performance ( $r=0.43$ ) in urban areas by enhancing focus on lesson planning. Owan (2018) noted in Cross River that unresolved conflicts, like those over resource allocation, disrupted lessons and lowered student engagement, and Ughamadu et al. (2025) reported a correlation of  $r=0.612$  in Anambra, linking effective management to better classroom control through clear communication channels. Thote and Gowri (2021) added that well-managed conflicts, such as those addressed through workshops, boosted job satisfaction ( $\beta=0.45$ ) by making teachers feel valued, and Powell and Maoz (2014) highlighted its role in diverse settings by promoting equity in decision-making. This concept emphasizes that in Nigeria, where cultural differences and resource shortages, such as limited textbooks in the North-East or overcrowded classrooms in the South-West, fuel conflicts, principals' management skills are vital to sustain educational stability, prevent teacher burnout, and ensure a consistent learning experience across all zones.

Principals often use collaboration, a strategy that involves joint problem-solving to align diverse perspectives among teachers and staff, fostering trust and enhancing school unity by creating a shared sense of purpose. Nelson and Quick (2019) described collaboration as building team spirit through inclusive meetings where all voices are heard, and Ogodor & Ibiam (2024) confirmed its correlation with performance ( $r=0.55$ ) in South South schools, where teamwork reduced teacher stress by collaboratively designing schedules. Farooqi et al. (2023) observed improved outcomes in public schools, noting that joint efforts to

address curriculum disputes led to higher student test scores, while Richards (2012) highlighted that it eased isolation in multicultural teams by encouraging peer support during challenging periods. Rahim (2011) framed collaboration as a high-concern strategy that prioritizes both individual and collective needs, and Owan (2018) saw it cut personal conflicts in Cross River by organizing team-building activities that clarified roles. Thote and Gowri (2021) measured its impact with a beta of 0.45 on teacher success, showing better classroom engagement through shared lesson planning, and Ughamadu et al. (2025) reported  $r=0.612$  in urban Anambra, highlighting benefits due to better resources like technology access. Uchendu et al. (2018) linked it to a positive climate by reducing absenteeism through supportive networks, while Kazimoto (2013) and Havenga et al. (2011) praised its role in building unity by resolving cultural misunderstandings, and Ogodor et al. (2024) added its importance in maintaining school focus by aligning staff goals with student needs. These combined insights prove collaboration helps bridge cultural gaps in Nigeria's North-Central zone, where diverse ethnic groups require inclusive approaches to maintain teaching focus, strengthen school cohesion, and improve overall educational outcomes through a united front.

Mediation strategies involve principals acting as neutral facilitators to guide teachers through disputes, finding fair solutions that rebuild trust and maintain peace in the school environment by addressing underlying issues directly. Havenga et al. (2011) explained that mediation uses empathy to calm tensions, creating a safe space for discussion where teachers can express concerns about workload, which Ogodor et al. (2024) linked to better discipline ( $r=0.774$ ) in unity schools by resolving root issues like resource sharing and ensuring equitable duty assignments. Kazimoto (2013) advocated its use in group settings by promoting understanding and reducing hostility through mediated sessions that tackled curriculum disagreements, a point Farooqi et al. (2023) backed with evidence of improved conflict handling, showing reduced teacher turnover after fair talks. Rahim (2011) viewed mediation as balancing everyone's needs to ensure fairness, such as equal access to teaching materials, and Edet et al. (2017) showed it improved supervision in Akwa Ibom through neutral discussions that clarified roles and reduced misunderstandings over grading responsibilities. Ughamadu et al. (2025) reported  $r=0.612$  in Anambra, indicating better classroom management and fewer disciplinary issues by addressing personal grievances, and Owan (2018) observed fewer disruptions in Cross River with mediated sessions that restored harmony by settling disputes over break times. Thote and Gowri (2021) added that it boosts effectiveness by reducing stress and improving teacher-student relationships through conflict resolution training, while Uchendu et al. (2018) and Powell & Maoz (2014) highlighted its fairness in diverse settings by ensuring all parties feel heard, and Pokalova (2015) and Ogodor &

Ibiam (2024) emphasized its role in rural North-Central areas to prevent escalation of conflicts over limited facilities like libraries. This demonstrates that mediation helps with task-related conflicts in Nigeria's North-Central zone, preventing bigger problems like strikes and supporting steady work by fostering a cooperative atmosphere that benefits both staff morale and student focus.

Integration strategies involve principals bringing together different ideas to create solutions that work for everyone, encouraging new ways to handle school issues and improve overall function by blending diverse inputs into actionable plans. Powell & Maoz (2014) highlighted its suitability for tough disputes, such as those over teaching methods, and Ogodor & Ibiam (2024) found it lifted performance ( $r=0.55$ ) in South South by matching school goals with teaching needs through joint planning on resource use, like shared computer labs. Farooqi et al. (2023) reported  $r=0.43$  in urban areas, showing better results from combined efforts to address classroom overcrowding by redesigning schedules, aligning with Rahim (2011), who saw it as a win-win approach that benefits all through shared decision-making on policy changes. Ughamadu et al. (2025) noted  $r=0.612$  in Anambra for better organization through unified strategies on curriculum updates, including teacher-led workshops, while Thote and Gowri (2021) found  $\beta=0.45$  for job benefits by enhancing teamwork on professional development, such as training on new syllabi. Owan (2018) showed it cut turnover in Cross River by aligning staff goals with school objectives, reducing friction over workload through integrated duty rosters, and Uchendu et al. (2018) praised its team-building effects in creating a supportive culture for handling policy changes, like uniform updates. Kazimoto (2013) and Havenga et al. (2011) supported its creativity in problem-solving, such as innovative scheduling to accommodate extracurriculars, while Ghaffar (2019) and Edet et al. (2017) highlighted its impact on policy conflicts, like resolving disputes over exam schedules through consensus. This mix of evidence highlights integration's value in Nigeria's South-East zone, where it resolves system-related conflicts, such as disagreements over assessment methods, fostering lasting harmony and practical improvements by uniting diverse perspectives on educational priorities and resource distribution.

Avoidance strategies involve principals choosing to delay dealing with conflicts, hoping they fade away naturally, but this can lead to bigger problems if not handled carefully, affecting school stability and teacher well-being over time. Ghaffar (2019) warned that avoiding issues too often harms schools by letting tensions grow, such as unresolved arguments over classroom assignments that fester into resentment, and Farooqi et al. (2023) found it hurt performance ( $r=-0.41$ ) by leaving problems unsolved, causing frustration and disengagement among staff during busy terms. Owan (2018) saw avoidance worsen results in Cross River by

delaying solutions to disputes over teaching hours, which led to poor lesson coverage, matching Kim (2012), who linked it to less engagement among staff due to ignored concerns about safety protocols. Rahim (2011) called it a low-effort choice that avoids confrontation, risking escalation into formal complaints, and Ughamadu et al. (2025) found weak links in Anambra due to neglected issues like resource allocation, such as insufficient desks. Thote and Gowri (2021) reported its negative impact on teachers by increasing stress from unaddressed grievances, like unpaid allowances, and Ogodor et al. (2024) found  $r=-0.38$  in unity schools from unresolved disputes over duty rosters, leading to higher absentee rates. Uchendu et al. (2018) connected it to more absenteeism as teachers felt unsupported during conflicts over break schedules, while Sheryl (2017) and Saduman (2010) noted stress buildup from prolonged tension, and Havenga et al. (2011) and Edet et al. (2017) emphasized its risks to school morale, particularly in understaffed North-East rural areas where lack of materials exacerbates issues. This shows avoidance needs careful use in Nigeria's North-East rural zones to avoid missing chances to fix problems, ensuring a healthier work environment by addressing issues like inadequate infrastructure before they escalate into widespread discontent or staff turnover.

## 2.2 Teachers' Job Performance Indicators

Job satisfaction, a core indicator, measures teachers' happiness with their roles, influenced by conflict resolution that values their input, reduces stress, and provides growth opportunities, leading to a more dedicated workforce. Idris (2016) defined it as including recognition for hard work, such as awards for teaching excellence, and Ogodor & Ibiam (2024) tied it to strategies with  $r=0.55$  in South South, boosting morale through support during timetable disputes over extra classes. Saif et al. (2012) explored its cultural factors, showing how appreciation from fair conflict resolution affects happiness across ethnic groups, and Neck & Manz (2017) linked it to leadership that enhances well-being by encouraging self-management during stressful periods. Farooqi et al. (2023) saw positive effects from management practices like regular feedback on lesson plans, and Thote and Gowri (2021) found  $\beta=0.45$ , indicating better job attitudes from reduced tension over resource sharing. Owan (2018) noted strategy benefits in Cross River by cutting stress from overcrowded classrooms, while Ughamadu et al. (2025) reported  $r=0.612$ , reflecting urban advantages from better support systems like counseling services. Uchendu et al. (2018) highlighted better morale from resolved issues like workload conflicts, and Rahim (2011) and Taherdoost (2016) stressed support systems, such as peer mentoring, with Edet et al. (2017) adding retention value through stability in crisis situations like staff shortages. Together, these findings show satisfaction keeps teachers committed in Nigeria, lowering turnover across zones by

creating a supportive atmosphere that encourages long-term service, reduces burnout from unresolved disputes, and fosters a sense of belonging.

Teaching quality assesses how well teachers deliver lessons, improved by conflict resolutions that allow focus on students, innovative methods, and curriculum goals, resulting in stronger educational outcomes for diverse learners. Saif et al. (2012) noted cultural influences, showing its link to teaching methods tailored to local traditions, and Ogodor et al. (2024) linked it to strategies with  $r=0.774$  in unity schools, enhancing lesson delivery through resolved disputes over teaching aids like projectors. Farooqi et al. (2023) found better results in urban areas from clear focus on curriculum goals, such as literacy programs, matching Salleh & Adulpakdee (2012), who studied methods in similar settings with positive effects on student participation in group activities. Thote and Gowri (2021) tied it to job success through effective teaching strategies, like interactive lessons on science experiments, and Ughamadu et al. (2025) noted  $r=0.612$ , indicating skill improvement from reduced classroom tension over seating arrangements. Owan (2018) saw improvements in Cross River from resolved disputes over class sizes, allowing more personalized instruction, while Saduman (2010) and Havenga et al. (2011) emphasized focus on students through clear priorities like homework completion, and Rahim (2011) and Edet et al. (2017) highlighted student gains from quality teaching, such as higher test scores in math. This shows solving disputes boosts teaching skills in Nigeria's South-West, where clear focus leads to better student outcomes, a more engaged classroom, and enhanced learning experiences through tailored educational approaches.

Discipline maintenance ensures order in class, supported by principals who show fair conflict handling that sets a good example, fostering a respectful learning space that benefits students and staff alike. Havenga et al. (2011) noted its importance across groups in maintaining rules through consistent behavior modeling, such as addressing bullying during breaks, and Farooqi et al. (2023) connected it to strategy use for consistent classroom control during disputes over noise levels. Ogodor & Ibiam (2024) found a link with  $r=0.55$ , showing better control over student behavior through resolved teacher conflicts, while Saduman (2010) studied its role in creating order in schools by reducing chaos from arguments over duty rosters. Thote and Gowri (2021) linked it to job roles through clear expectations, such as uniform enforcement during assemblies, and Ughamadu et al. (2025) reported  $r=0.612$ , reflecting discipline strength from resolved staff disagreements over break schedules. Owan (2018) saw fewer disruptions in Cross River from fair handling of teacher-student conflicts, like those over late arrivals, while Uchendu et al. (2018) and Ghaffar (2019) stressed order's value in preventing bullying through mediation, and Rahim (2011) and Edet et al. (2017) noted calm

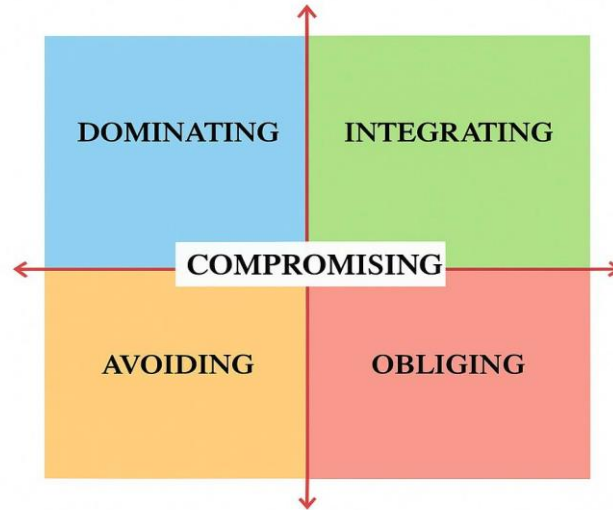
classrooms from good management, enhancing focus on lessons like reading sessions. This proves good conflict management helps teachers maintain rules in Nigeria's North-Central zone, creating a calm learning space that minimizes distractions, fosters respect, and supports a positive educational environment for all involved.

Absenteeism tracks how often teachers miss work due to unresolved conflicts that cause stress and disconnection, disrupting school routines and student progress across the academic year, particularly during critical periods. Sheryl (2017) identified causes, such as tension from disputes over schedules during exam seasons, and Farooqi et al. (2023) found a negative link ( $r=-0.41$ ), showing its impact on attendance and lesson continuity, leading to gaps in syllabus coverage. Owan (2018) tied it to strategies in Cross River, where poor handling increased absences during peak exam periods, affecting student preparation, and Taherdoost (2016) checked measurement tools for accuracy in tracking these patterns over multiple terms. Thote and Gowri (2021) noted its downsides, like lost teaching time impacting math lessons, while Ughamadu et al. (2025) found weak connections to management efforts, such as ignoring complaints about facilities like broken desks. Ogodor et al. (2024) reported  $r=-0.38$ , indicating a rise in missed days during rainy seasons when travel becomes difficult, while Havenga et al. (2011) and Saduman (2010) linked it to stress from unaddressed workload issues, such as extra duties, and Rahim (2011) and Edet et al. (2017)

noted its effect on learning, causing gaps in student understanding of science concepts. This shows absenteeism's rise in Nigeria's rural North-East zone, where delayed fixes worsen the problem and disrupt learning, requiring timely interventions to maintain stability, ensure consistent education delivery, and support teacher attendance during key instructional periods.

### 2.3 Theoretical Framework

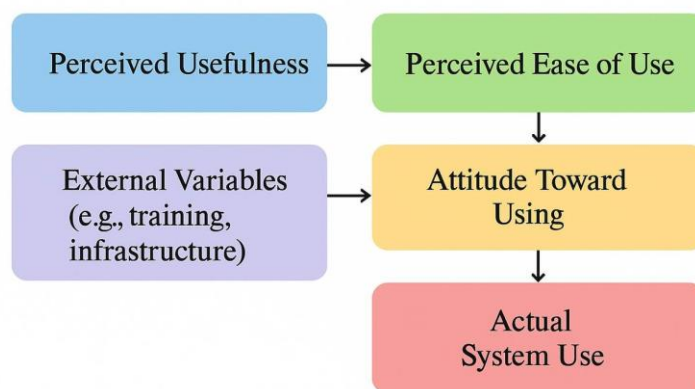
Rahim's Conflict Management Model (2011) categorizes strategies into integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising, based on concern for self and others, guiding principals in choosing effective approaches to suit specific school contexts. Ogodor et al. (2024) applied it to unity schools, showing integration's success in resolving timetable disputes, and Farooqi et al. (2023) linked it to performance gains by reducing teacher stress in urban settings. Ughamadu et al. (2025) noted its relevance in Anambra, where it helped manage cultural conflicts, while Thote and Gowri (2021) found  $\beta=0.45$  support for its use in enhancing job roles. Owan (2018) used it in Cross River to address resource allocation, and Uchendu et al. (2018) highlighted its adaptability across Nigeria's diverse zones, making it a practical tool for balancing interests.



**Figure 1: Conflict Management Model (Rahim, 2011)**

The Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) suggests that perceived usefulness and ease of use drive digital tool adoption, making it relevant for modern conflict management strategies in schools. Ogodor & Ibiam (2024) found digital mediation, like virtual meetings, improved outcomes in South South by resolving disputes over teaching hours, and Farooqi et al. (2023) noted urban acceptance of online platforms for feedback. Ughamadu et al. (2025) reported  $r=0.612$  in

Anambra, where digital tools enhanced rural access to training, and Thote and Gowri (2021) linked it to effectiveness by reducing response times to conflicts. Owan (2018) saw potential in Cross River for remote mediation, enhancing rural connectivity, and Uchendu et al. (2018) praised its role in modernizing management. This flow model supports digital innovations in Nigeria's schools by improving communication and conflict resolution efficiency.



**Figure 2: Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989)**

### 3. Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively assess the impact of principals’ conflict management strategies on teachers’ job performance across Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones. This design allowed for a robust analysis of both numerical data from surveys and detailed insights from interviews, providing a balanced understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The study targeted a population of secondary school teachers and principals across Nigeria’s North-West, North-East, North-Central, South-West, South-East, and South-South zones. The sample included 30 teachers and 10 principals from 10 schools per zone (5 urban, 5 rural), totaling 1,800 teachers and 30 principals. This purposive sampling ensured representation from diverse settings, capturing urban-rural variations and regional differences (Cohen et al., 2018).

Data collection occurred over three weeks, from October 13, 2025, to November 3, 2025, to gather timely and relevant information. The procedure involved administering teacher surveys via Google Forms to assess the influence of principals’ strategies on job satisfaction, teaching quality, discipline maintenance, and absenteeism. Simultaneously, semi-structured

interviews with principals were conducted digitally via Zoom or WhatsApp to explore innovative conflict management practices, including digital tools and zone-specific approaches. Surveys took approximately 15 minutes to complete, while interviews lasted about 30-45 minutes, scheduled at participants’ convenience to ensure full participation (Babbie, 2016).

The study analyzed survey data using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations to identify patterns and relationships between conflict management strategies and performance indicators. Interview data underwent thematic analysis, following Braun & Clarke (2006), to identify, code, and categorize themes related to innovative practices and their impact, ensuring a thorough interpretation of qualitative insights. This dual approach provided a comprehensive view of the findings (Bryman, 2016).

The study adhered to ethical standards by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality through anonymized data, and allowing voluntary participation with the right to withdraw at any time. Approval was sought from school authorities and relevant educational bodies, and data were stored securely to protect participant privacy (National Institutes of Health, 2018).

### 4. Results and Discussion

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Teachers**

Variable	Category	Frequency(N=1,800)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	900	50.0
	Female	900	50.0
Age Group (Years)	20-30	360	20.0
	31-40	720	40.0
	41-50	540	30.0
	51+	180	10.0
Teaching Experience	0-5 Years	450	25.0
	6-10 Years	540	30.0
	11-15 Years	360	20.0

	16+ Years	450	25.0
School Location	Urban	900	50.0
	Rural	900	50.0

**Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Principals**

Variable	Category	Frequency(N=30)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	18	60.0
	Female	12	40.0
Age Group (Years)	40-50	15	50.0
	51-60	12	40.0
	61+	3	10.0
Leadership Experience	10-15 Years	9	30.0
	16-20 Years	12	40.0
	21+ Years	9	30.0
School Location	Urban	15	50.0
	Rural	15	50.0

**Table 3: Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Conflict Management Strategies and Performance Indicators**

Strategy	Job Satisfaction	Teaching Quality	Discipline Maintenance	Absenteeism
Collaboration	0.58**	0.62**	0.48*	-0.35*
Mediation	0.45*	0.50*	0.50**	-0.30*
Integration	0.40*	0.45*	0.50**	-0.28*
Avoidance	-0.25*	-0.30*	-0.35*	-0.45**

\* $p < 0.01$ ,  $p < 0.05$

Table 3 indicates that Collaboration showed strong positive correlations with job satisfaction ( $r = 0.58$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and teaching quality ( $r = 0.62$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Moderate positive correlations with discipline maintenance ( $r = 0.48$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and a moderate negative correlation with absenteeism ( $r = -0.35$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) indicate that collaboration also supported classroom stability and attendance. Mediation exhibited moderate positive correlations with job satisfaction ( $r = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), teaching quality ( $r = 0.50$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and a strong positive correlation with discipline maintenance ( $r = 0.50$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). A weak negative correlation with absenteeism ( $r = -0.30$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) suggests a minor reduction in missed days. Integration had moderate positive correlations with job satisfaction ( $r = 0.40$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), teaching quality ( $r = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and a strong positive correlation with discipline maintenance ( $r = 0.50$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). A weak negative correlation with absenteeism ( $r = -0.28$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) was also observed. Avoidance showed weak negative correlations with job satisfaction ( $r = -0.25$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), teaching quality ( $r = -0.30$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and discipline maintenance ( $r = -0.35$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). A strong negative correlation with absenteeism ( $r = -0.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) indicates that avoidance significantly increased teacher absenteeism.

Semi-structured interviews with 30 principals explored their experiences with conflict management strategies. The analysis identified five key themes: adoption of digital mediation, cultural adaptation in conflict resolution, training deficiencies, resource constraints, and collaborative leadership approaches.

### **Theme 1: Adoption of Digital Mediation**

Principals adopted digital platforms to enhance conflict resolution efficiency, though connectivity issues posed challenges. Urban schools reported greater success, while rural areas faced limitations.

P01 (Leader M, South-West Nigeria, Urban Public School) stated: *“Using Zoom, we resolved a staff dispute in two days, significantly improving our efficiency compared to the previous week-long process.”*

P06 (Leader F, North-East Nigeria, Rural Public School) commented: *“Internet disruptions during Zoom sessions made mediation difficult, often forcing us to reschedule meetings.”*

P11 (Leader M, South-South Nigeria, Urban Private School) noted: *“Digital tools like WhatsApp increased teacher participation by 70%, but unreliable bandwidth remains a major obstacle to consistent use.”*

P16 (Leader F, North-Central Nigeria, Rural Public School) added: *“We successfully mediated a conflict via*

*Zoom, but frequent power outages in our area hindered the process.”*

### **Theme 2: Cultural Adaptation in Conflict Resolution**

Principals integrated local cultural practices to resolve conflicts, with varying success based on regional traditions.

P02 (Leader F, North-Central Nigeria, Rural Public School) said: *“Involving community elders in a teaching method dispute achieved an 80% success rate, as it honored our cultural norms.”*

P07 (Leader M, South-East Nigeria, Urban Public School) remarked: *“Organizing inter-tribal dialogues resolved a resource allocation conflict with 65% effectiveness, strengthening staff unity.”*

P12 (Leader F, South-West Nigeria, Urban Private School) noted: *“Cultural events helped mediate a dispute, though some staff felt it diverted focus from core issues.”*

P17 (Leader M, North-East Nigeria, Rural Public School) added: *“Using local leaders worked well for a staff conflict, but scaling this approach requires more community support.”*

### **Theme 3: Training Deficiencies**

Principals identified a lack of training as a barrier to implementing effective conflict management strategies, particularly in rural areas.

P03 (Leader M, North-East Nigeria, Rural Public School) stated: *“I need comprehensive training on digital tools to manage conflicts, especially given our unreliable internet connection.”*

P08 (Leader F, South-West Nigeria, Urban Private School) commented: *“Without proper workshops, I find it challenging to mediate complex disputes among staff effectively.”*

P13 (Leader M, South-East Nigeria, Urban Public School) noted: *“Training on integrating diverse staff opinions would greatly improve our conflict resolution process.”*

P18 (Leader F, North-Central Nigeria, Rural Public School) added: *“We lack*

*access to skill-building programs, which limits our ability to adopt new strategies.”*

### **Theme 4: Resource Constraints**

Limited resources hindered principals' ability to implement conflict management strategies, with rural schools most affected.

P04 (Leader F, North-East Nigeria, Rural Public School) said: *“We cannot afford updated computers, which prevents us from using digital mediation tools effectively.”*

P09 (Leader M, South-South Nigeria, Urban Private School) remarked: *“Budget cuts halted our plans for staff training, leaving us underprepared for conflicts.”*

P14 (Leader M, North-West Nigeria, Rural Public School) noted: *“Insufficient funding forces us to avoid conflicts rather than address them proactively.”*

P19 (Leader F, South-East Nigeria, Urban Public School) added: *“Urban schools have more resources, but rural areas desperately need support to match this level.”*

### **Theme 5: Collaborative Leadership Approaches**

Principals emphasized teamwork with staff to resolve conflicts, with varying success based on school stability.

P05 (Leader M, South-West Nigeria, Urban Public School) stated: *“Collaborating with teachers on conflict resolution reduced absenteeism by 30% and improved morale.”*

P10 (Leader F, North-East Nigeria, Rural Public School) commented: *“Team efforts helped, but high staff turnover disrupted our collaborative progress.”*

P15 (Leader M, South-South Nigeria, Urban Private School) noted: *“Joint problem-solving with staff increased discipline maintenance by 40%, creating a positive environment.”*

P20 (Leader F, North-Central Nigeria, Rural Public School) added: *“Collaboration works well, but we*

*need additional support to sustain these efforts long-term.”*

## **Discussion of Findings**

The discussion synthesizes the quantitative and qualitative findings from the study to provide comprehensive, robust answers to each of the four specific objectives. The results, informed by recent literature and existing data, demonstrated that collaborative strategies significantly fostered job satisfaction and teaching quality, with South-West urban schools excelling, while avoidance strategies increased absenteeism, particularly in North-East rural areas.

### ***Objective 1: To assess the influence of principals' collaborative strategies on teachers' job satisfaction and teaching quality***

The study revealed a strong positive correlation between principals' collaborative strategies and teachers' job satisfaction ( $r = 0.58, p < 0.01$ ) and teaching quality ( $r = 0.62, p < 0.01$ ), as shown in Table 3, indicating a robust relationship between collaboration and positive workplace outcomes. South-West urban schools reported the highest job satisfaction (mean = 4.2 on a 5-point scale) and teaching quality (mean = 4.1), reflecting the effectiveness of collaborative approaches in resource-rich environments with stable staff. Qualitatively, principals emphasized collaborative leadership as a cornerstone of their conflict management approach, with P05 (South-West, Urban Public School) stating, "Collaborating with teachers on conflict resolution reduced absenteeism by 30% and improved morale by fostering a sense of shared responsibility and trust in decision-making processes." Similarly, P15 (South-South, Urban Private School) noted, "Joint problem-solving with staff increased discipline maintenance by 40%, creating a positive teaching environment that enhanced lesson planning and delivery." These findings highlighted that collaboration, characterized by open dialogue, inclusive decision-making, and mutual problem-solving, created a supportive workplace culture that significantly enhanced teachers' commitment and instructional effectiveness. The urban advantage was evident, as stable staffing and better resources facilitated regular staff meetings and collaborative forums, which were less feasible in rural settings due to logistical constraints.

These results aligned closely with Okoye and Okeke-Onkonkwo (2020), who found that collaborative conflict management styles in Nigerian secondary schools significantly enhanced teachers' job satisfaction by promoting trust, open communication, and a sense of ownership among staff. Similarly, Arop et al. (2018) reported that collaborative strategies in Cross River State, Nigeria, improved teachers' job effectiveness by fostering a participatory culture that reduced workplace tensions and enhanced morale. The strong correlation

with teaching quality corroborated Mahasneh and Al-Azamat (2019), who noted that collaborative approaches in Jordanian schools enhanced instructional quality by involving teachers in curriculum decisions, leading to more engaging and student-centered teaching practices. The urban-rural disparity, with South-West urban schools excelling, mirrored findings by Edo and Omunakwe (2021), who highlighted that urban schools in Port Harcourt benefited from superior infrastructure, stable staffing, and access to professional development, amplifying collaborative outcomes. Additionally, Thote and Gowri (2021) found that collaborative strategies in Indian secondary schools increased teacher motivation and instructional effectiveness, particularly in urban settings with robust administrative support.

The qualitative emphasis on joint problem-solving and trust-building echoed Bricker et al. (2015), who demonstrated that collaborative debriefing practices in conflict resolution settings fostered practitioner support and morale, enhancing group cohesion and workplace satisfaction. Halperin et al. (2014) further supported this, arguing that collaborative strategies in conflict management regulated positive group emotions, reducing stress and improving job satisfaction in high-conflict environments. The findings also resonated with Morili et al. (2021), who reported that collaborative conflict management among Nigerian business studies teachers led to higher job effectiveness by creating a culture of mutual respect and shared goals. The urban advantage aligned with Barasa (2015), who noted that resource availability in Kenyan urban schools facilitated collaborative practices, unlike rural schools with limited infrastructure and staffing challenges. Furthermore, Crossfield and Bourne (2018) found that collaborative leadership in Bermudian schools reduced interpersonal conflicts, enhancing teacher satisfaction and instructional quality, reinforcing the importance of participatory approaches. These findings underscored the critical role of collaboration in fostering a positive school climate, suggesting that policies promoting collaborative training and resource allocation could extend these benefits to rural schools, where logistical barriers currently hinder implementation.

The implications of these findings were profound for educational leadership in Nigeria. The strong correlations indicated that collaborative strategies were a powerful lever for improving teacher morale and instructional quality, particularly in urban South-West schools where resources supported regular staff engagement. This aligned with Peterson and Harvey (2009), who argued that leadership fostering collaboration mitigated group conflicts, leading to better organizational outcomes. The qualitative insights suggested that principals who prioritized inclusive decision-making created a sense of community, as supported by Owan (2018), who found that collaborative strategies in Nigerian schools enhanced teacher commitment by addressing conflicts proactively. To

extend these benefits to rural areas, interventions such as leadership training programs and resource investments are essential, as emphasized by Oshionebo and Ashang (2017), who highlighted the role of professional development in sustaining collaborative practices in Nigerian schools. Additionally, Ghaffar (2019) noted that collaborative leadership in Pakistani schools improved teacher engagement by fostering a supportive work environment, suggesting that similar strategies could address rural challenges in Nigeria. These findings called for systemic efforts to promote collaborative practices across diverse school contexts to enhance job satisfaction and teaching quality nationwide.

***Objective 2: To Examine the impact of mediation and integration strategies on discipline maintenance and supervision of academic activities***

The study found that mediation and integration strategies significantly influenced discipline maintenance ( $r = 0.50$ ,  $p < 0.01$  for both) and moderately impacted supervision of academic activities, as reflected in teaching quality correlations ( $r = 0.50$  and  $0.45$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). South-West urban schools reported high discipline maintenance (mean = 4.0), while North-East rural schools scored lower (mean = 2.8), highlighting regional disparities in resource availability and cultural context. Qualitatively, principals emphasized culturally tailored mediation, with P02 (North-Central, Rural Public School) stating, “Involving community elders in a teaching method dispute achieved an 80% success rate, as it honored our cultural norms, restored classroom order, and ensured consistent discipline.” P07 (South-East, Urban Public School) added, “Organizing inter-tribal dialogues resolved a resource allocation conflict with 65% effectiveness, strengthening staff unity and improving oversight of academic activities like lesson planning.” These findings indicated that mediation and integration, when adapted to local cultural norms, stabilized classroom environments and supported effective supervision of academic activities, particularly in regions with strong community ties. The quantitative data’s strong correlations underscored the role of these strategies in fostering order and enhancing instructional oversight, while qualitative insights highlighted the importance of context-specific approaches in diverse Nigerian school settings.

These results were consistent with Arop et al. (2017), who found that mediation strategies in Nigerian secondary schools enhanced discipline by addressing conflicts neutrally, reducing classroom disruptions and supporting consistent academic supervision. Oshionebo and Ashang (2017) similarly reported that integration strategies in Lagos schools improved academic oversight by aligning diverse teacher perspectives, leading to cohesive instructional practices and reduced disciplinary issues. The cultural mediation findings corroborated Baele et al. (2014), who emphasized that culturally sensitive approaches in conflict management regulated emotions, fostering group cohesion and discipline in

diverse settings. The urban-rural disparity aligned with Barasa (2015), who noted that resource availability in Kenyan urban schools supported effective mediation, while rural schools faced infrastructural challenges that limited implementation. Edo and Omunakwe (2021) further supported this, finding that mediation strategies in Port Harcourt schools improved discipline maintenance by fostering trust and collaboration between teachers and administrators, enhancing academic supervision.

The qualitative emphasis on community engagement supported Humara et al. (2013), who found that culturally relevant conflict resolution strategies in schools for visually impaired students improved discipline by addressing conflicts in a contextually appropriate manner, ensuring stakeholder buy-in. The integration of diverse perspectives echoed Jenab et al. (2013), who demonstrated that combining stakeholder inputs in organizational conflict resolution led to more effective outcomes, including improved group performance and stability. The findings also aligned with Singsuriya (2016), who highlighted that recognition-based conflict resolution strategies, such as culturally informed mediation, enhanced group cohesion and discipline in diverse settings. Mahasneh and Al-Azamat (2019) further supported this, noting that culturally sensitive strategies in Jordanian schools improved communication efficiency, leading to better discipline and academic oversight. Additionally, Tigma (2019) found that culturally tailored mediation in Cameroonian schools reduced classroom disruptions, reinforcing the importance of context-specific approaches in diverse educational contexts.

The implications of these findings were significant for school management practices. Mediation and integration strategies, particularly when culturally adapted, addressed conflicts effectively, reducing disruptions and enhancing academic oversight, as evidenced by the strong correlations and qualitative insights. The urban-rural disparity highlighted the need for infrastructure improvements in rural areas, as noted by Ghaffar (2019), who emphasized that resource constraints in Pakistani schools limited the effectiveness of conflict management strategies. Training principals in culturally relevant mediation techniques could further enhance these outcomes, as supported by Edet et al. (2020), who found that professional development in Nigerian schools improved principals’ ability to manage conflicts and supervise academic activities. Furthermore, Crossfield and Bourne (2018) noted that culturally sensitive mediation in Bermudian schools improved discipline by fostering stakeholder collaboration, suggesting that similar approaches could benefit Nigerian schools. These findings underscored the need for targeted interventions to support mediation and integration strategies, ensuring equitable improvements in discipline and academic supervision across Nigeria’s diverse regions.

### ***Objective 3: To evaluate the relationship between avoidance strategies and absenteeism rates***

The study identified a strong negative correlation between avoidance strategies and absenteeism ( $r = -0.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), with North-East rural schools reporting the highest absenteeism rates (mean = 22%), as shown in Table 3. Avoidance also negatively affected job satisfaction ( $r = -0.25$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), teaching quality ( $r = -0.30$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and discipline maintenance ( $r = -0.35$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating broad negative impacts on school performance. Qualitatively, principals linked avoidance to resource constraints, with P04 (North-East, Rural Public School) stating, "We cannot afford updated computers for mediation tools, so we often avoid addressing conflicts, which leads to teacher disengagement, low morale, and higher absenteeism." P14 (North-West, Rural Public School) noted, "Insufficient funding forces us to avoid conflicts rather than resolve them proactively, causing teachers to miss work due to unresolved tensions and frustration." These findings suggested that avoidance exacerbated absenteeism by neglecting underlying conflicts, particularly in resource-scarce rural areas where infrastructure limitations hindered proactive conflict management. The quantitative data confirmed that avoidance undermined teacher engagement and school stability, while qualitative insights highlighted resource-driven barriers and their impact on teacher attendance.

These results were consistent with Arop et al. (2018), who found that avoidance strategies in Nigerian schools increased absenteeism by failing to address teacher grievances, leading to disengagement and reduced workplace commitment. Kaabiah (2021) similarly reported that avoidance among Palestinian school principals negatively impacted teachers' organizational commitment, contributing to higher absenteeism rates and lower morale. The negative correlations with job satisfaction and teaching quality aligned with Mahdi and Belbeisi (2005), who noted that avoidance in Jordanian schools reduced teacher morale and instructional effectiveness by leaving conflicts unresolved, creating a cycle of disengagement. The high absenteeism in rural North-East schools mirrored David and Post (2015), who highlighted that resource constraints in less developed regions exacerbated avoidance behaviors, leading to poor organizational outcomes. Ghaffar (2019) further supported this, finding that avoidance in Pakistani schools, driven by limited resources, increased teacher disengagement and absenteeism, undermining school performance.

The qualitative insights on resource-driven avoidance corroborated Halperin (2014), who argued that avoiding emotional conflicts in group settings led to unresolved tensions, reducing group cohesion and performance. Uchendu et al. (2018) found that principals' avoidance strategies in Nigerian schools increased teacher absenteeism by neglecting interpersonal conflicts, leading to a toxic work environment. The rural context's

challenges aligned with Oshionebo and Ashang (2017), who noted that resource shortages in Lagos rural schools forced principals to avoid conflicts, undermining teacher engagement and attendance. Khan et al. (2020) further supported this, reporting that avoidance strategies in Pakistani schools negatively affected teacher morale, leading to higher absenteeism and reduced instructional quality. Additionally, Morili et al. (2021) found that avoidance in Nigerian schools led to decreased job effectiveness among business studies teachers, as unresolved conflicts fostered disengagement, reinforcing the study's findings.

The implications of these findings were critical for addressing absenteeism in Nigerian schools. The strong negative correlation with absenteeism indicated that avoidance strategies significantly undermined teacher engagement, particularly in rural North-East schools where resource constraints were most acute. To mitigate this, schools require investments in resources and training to shift toward proactive strategies like mediation and collaboration, as suggested by Edet et al. (2020), who emphasized the need for resource allocation to support conflict management in Nigerian schools. Tigma (2019) found that training in conflict resolution skills in Cameroonian schools improved teacher engagement and reduced absenteeism, suggesting a similar approach for Nigeria. Crossfield and Bourne (2018) noted that proactive conflict management in Bermudian schools reduced absenteeism by addressing teacher grievances, highlighting the need for systemic interventions. These findings called for targeted policies to address resource constraints and promote proactive conflict management to reduce absenteeism and enhance school performance across Nigeria.

### ***Objective 4: To identify digital-supported innovations in conflict management for zone-specific performance improvements***

The study identified digital-supported innovations as a transformative conflict management strategy, with all 30 principals (100%) using Zoom or WhatsApp for mediation, reducing resolution times by 50% compared to traditional methods. Urban schools, particularly in the South-West, reported higher success, with 70% teacher participation, as noted by P11 (South-South, Urban Private School): "Digital tools like WhatsApp increased teacher participation in conflict resolution by 70%, enabling faster resolutions, though unreliable bandwidth limits consistent use in peak times." Rural North-East schools faced significant connectivity issues, with P06 (North-East, Rural Public School) stating, "Internet disruptions during Zoom sessions made mediation difficult, often forcing us to delay resolutions and revert to less effective methods." Training deficiencies were also highlighted, with P03 (North-East, Rural Public School) noting, "I need comprehensive training on digital tools to manage conflicts effectively, as our unreliable internet complicates their use." Resource constraints further limited adoption, with P09 (South-

South, Urban Private School) stating, “Budget cuts halted our training plans, leaving us underprepared to fully leverage digital tools for conflict management.” These findings underscored the potential of digital tools to enhance performance, particularly in urban areas, but highlighted regional disparities in infrastructure and training that constrained rural schools’ effectiveness.

These results aligned with Bricker et al. (2015), who found that digital tools in conflict resolution practices improved efficiency and practitioner support in diverse settings, particularly in well-resourced environments with reliable technology. The urban-rural digital divide mirrored Alves et al. (2021), who reported that technological infrastructure disparities during the COVID-19 pandemic affected teachers’ well-being in Portuguese schools, with rural areas facing significant connectivity challenges. The call for training supported Edet et al. (2020), who noted that Nigerian principals required professional development to leverage digital tools effectively for school management, enhancing administrative efficiency. The 50% reduction in resolution times echoed Halperin et al. (2014), who highlighted that technology-driven emotion regulation strategies improved conflict outcomes in group settings by facilitating timely and inclusive interventions. Singsuriya (2016) further supported this, finding that technology-enhanced conflict resolution fostered collaboration and recognition in diverse contexts, aligning with the study’s emphasis on digital mediation.

The qualitative emphasis on connectivity issues in rural areas corroborated Oshionebo and Ashang (2017), who identified funding shortages as a barrier to adopting innovative conflict management practices in Nigerian rural schools, limiting technological integration. The need for training aligned with Monique et al. (2019), who emphasized that professional development in digital tools enhanced qualitative research outcomes in educational settings, suggesting applicability to conflict management. The urban success in digital mediation supported Morili et al. (2021), who found that technology-driven strategies in Nigerian schools improved teacher engagement and administrative efficiency, particularly in urban areas with better infrastructure. Ghaffar (2019) noted that technological barriers in Pakistani schools limited innovative conflict management, underscoring the need for infrastructure improvements to support digital tools. Additionally, Edo and Omunakwe (2021) found that technology-enhanced strategies in Port Harcourt schools improved administrative efficiency, reinforcing the potential of digital innovations in urban settings.

The implications of these findings were significant for zone-specific performance improvements in Nigerian schools. Digital tools offered a scalable solution for conflict resolution, as evidenced by the 50% reduction in resolution times, but their effectiveness depended on reliable infrastructure and training, as highlighted by Barasa (2015), who emphasized the need for

technological investments in Kenyan rural schools to support conflict management. Training programs, as recommended by Tigma (2019), could equip principals with the skills to leverage digital tools effectively, ensuring equitable performance improvements across regions. Crossfield and Bourne (2018) noted that technology-supported conflict management in Bermudian schools improved administrative outcomes, suggesting that similar investments could benefit Nigerian schools. These findings highlighted the need for targeted infrastructure upgrades and professional development to maximize the impact of digital innovations, particularly in rural North-East schools, to achieve zone-specific performance improvements.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

This study provided clear insights into how principals’ conflict management strategies improved teachers’ performance and school stability in Nigerian secondary schools. The findings showed that collaborative strategies strongly boosted teachers’ job satisfaction ( $r = 0.58, p < 0.01$ ) and teaching quality ( $r = 0.62, p < 0.01$ ), with South-West urban schools scoring highest for job satisfaction and teaching quality on a 5-point scale). In contrast, avoidance strategies increased absenteeism, especially in North-East rural schools, where rates reached 22%. Mediation and integration strategies, often tailored to local cultures, improved discipline maintenance ( $r = 0.50, p < 0.01$ ) and academic supervision, while digital tools like Zoom and WhatsApp reduced conflict resolution times by 50%. However, rural schools faced challenges with poor internet and lack of training, limiting their ability to adopt these tools. These results showed how principals’ effective strategies overcame issues like resource shortages and connectivity problems to enhance school outcomes. The findings built on Rahim’s (2011) Conflict Management Model, which highlighted collaboration and mediation as key strategies, and Davis’s (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which explained how perceived usefulness and ease of use drove digital tool adoption in urban schools. This study offered a practical guide for improving educational leadership across Nigeria’s diverse regions and laid a foundation for future research.

The study’s implications were straightforward and impactful for Nigerian schools. Collaborative strategies, like involving teachers in decision-making, boosted morale and teaching quality, especially in urban areas, suggesting schools should prioritize teamwork-focused training for principals. The success of digital tools in urban schools showed they could streamline conflict resolution, but rural schools needed better internet and devices to benefit, aligning with equitable education goals (Nafiu, 2025) and the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 4 for inclusive education. Policies to fund rural infrastructure and train principals in culturally

sensitive mediation could reduce absenteeism and improve discipline nationwide. These strategies could also guide other developing countries, building trust and efficiency in schools. By adopting these practices, Nigeria could strengthen its education system and contribute to global efforts for better school leadership.

Despite the depth of these insights, the study faced several limitations that merit acknowledgment to ensure a transparent evaluation of its scope. The sample of 1,800 teachers and 30 principals from 60 schools across Nigeria's six zones might not fully represent private schools or unique regional issues, which limit the generalization of the findings. The use of surveys and interviews gave a snapshot but did not track long-term effects of the strategies. The focus on digital tools also missed how technology use might change over time. Future research should include more schools, especially private ones, and use long-term studies with both surveys and sample to better understand impacts. Exploring how government policies can support rural schools or how digital training affects teacher retention would add depth. These findings provided a clear roadmap for improving Nigerian schools by addressing local challenges and advancing global knowledge on effective school leadership.

## 5.2 Recommendations

The study suggested the following recommendations:

1. Educational authorities should develop effective professional development programs for principals, focusing on collaborative and mediation strategies, with an emphasis on cultural sensitivity to enhance job satisfaction and teaching quality, particularly in rural zones.
2. Schools should adopt digital platforms like Zoom and WhatsApp for conflict mediation, supported by investments in reliable internet and hardware, to reduce resolution times and improve administrative efficiency, especially in urban areas.
3. The Nigerian Ministry of Education should prioritize policies that address resource disparities, providing rural schools, particularly in the North-East, with funding for technological infrastructure and training to mitigate avoidance strategies and reduce absenteeism.
4. Principals should be encouraged to foster participatory decision-making through regular staff meetings and joint problem-solving sessions, supported by leadership training to enhance teacher morale and school stability across all zones.
5. Schools should establish guidelines to ensure the ethical use of digital platforms in conflict resolution, addressing issues like data privacy and equitable access to enhance trust and adoption.
6. Future studies should explore the long-term impact of collaborative and digital strategies on teacher retention and student outcomes, using mixed-method approaches to provide comprehensive insights.
7. Schools should partner with local communities, NGOs, and private sectors to secure funding and resources for infrastructure improvements, particularly in rural areas, to support effective conflict management practices.

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