

Conflict Management in Public Tertiary Institution, Southwest Nigeria

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| Received: 24.04.2023 | Accepted: 18.05.2023 | Published: 26.05.2023

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Abstract

This study was carried out to assess conflict and its management in Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti, Ekiti state, Nigeria. It examined the causes of conflict in the institution in Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti. These were with the view to assessing causes of conflicts and its management in tertiary institutions. Primary and secondary data were used to evaluate the causes and consequences of conflict on the institution. The primary data were collected through administration of copies of questionnaire while Secondary data were obtained through textbooks, journals, internet document and official publications. Two hundred and three (203) copies of questionnaire were randomly distributed to the respondents which represented 10% of the total population, while one hundred and eighty-six (186) were retrieved and analysed (representing 91.6%). The data collected from the questionnaire were analysed descriptively using frequency distribution and standard deviation. This study revealed that communication gap (85.4%), late payment of remunerations (93.5%) and poor availability of facilities and equipment in the institution (84.9%) are the major factors responsible for conflicts between staff and management in the institution. The study concluded that conflict management had been ineffective in Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Keywords: Conflict, Conflict Management, University, Ekiti State.

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INTRODUCTION

In human society, conflict is usually regarded as an inevitable situation which manifest in many ways with diverse interpretations (Akpaprep, Bagah, & Teng-Zeng, 2019, para. 1). Conflict is an inevitable part of life, be it individually or in a group as they work on projects, objectives or goals. Differences in opinions, ideas and sense of belief can ignite conflict among staff, between staff and management as well as students and school. However, conflict is hard to characterize, in light of the fact that it happens in a wide range of settings. The substance of strife is by all account different, inconsistent and contrary. In this way, conflict alludes to any circumstance where there are contradictory goals, emotions inside or between people that leads to resistance. In recent times, conflict in public institutions has been an everyday scenario, occurring and will continue to occur if solutions are not provided. It is not an anomaly to expect conflict in administration of higher learning institutions. Nonetheless, when conflict is poorly managed in public institutions it becomes a problem.

In spite of the fact that conflict in universities are known for negative effects, it can even now be

utilized to create and elevate the foundation to a successful level if the best possible management strategy of the conflict is utilized. Sources of conflict in higher institution can be internal or external. Internal in the sense of arising among the students, staff or management of the institution which may be due to unfavorable policies such as unnecessary increase of school fees, or external with regards to the institution and the State Government which has been a major cause of conflict in the Nigerian universities. The stakeholders, that is, students and staff (academic, non-academic and administrators) engender conflict which may result in protest, revolts, unrest and violence, leading to closure of academic programmes for months (Adeyemi, Ekundayo & Alonge, 2009). The conflict between Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) or Non Academic Staff Union (NASU) and the State Government has always been a re-occurring issue which if not managed will continue to linger on. Some causes of conflict in higher institutions of learning are poor funding mechanisms by the State Government to the institution (Umo, 4014) and rehabilitation of learning facilities, leadership styles in Nigeria universities (Alabi, 2002); likewise late remunerations of accrued allowances owed by the State government to

the academic staff and non-academic staff of the institution.

Conflict management is aimed at avoiding the acute and chronic stages of crisis. A conflict is said to be effectively managed if it moves from prodromal to resolution stage. It is the open and clear dialogue to help opposing parties to agree against continuous use of hostile actions or images while complying with aggrieved resolution and strategies to restore peace. It is about using managerial tactics to contain a conflict and control the environment. The reason for management of conflict, regardless of whether embraced by the parties involved in the case of including the intercession of an outsider, is to influence the whole structure of a contention to contain the damaging parts in the conflict procedure. How conflict is being managed will determine if the institution will achieve a positive or negative outcome. The negative aspect of conflict on the institution is that, it leads to wastage of time and energy of the executives, managers as well as the administrators and it can be so damaging that lots of money can be spent when facilities and equipment are destroyed.

Further, if unresolved on time, it could lead to continued conflict and the situation may become complex and difficult to handle (Ndum & Okey, 2013). Consequently, when conflict is properly managed, the parties involved could see it as an opportunity for actual self-assessment, as a mirror that projects the true inward pictures of a man with regard to their strengths and weaknesses and could lead to innovations, better approaches and methods to get better results and promote productivity in the institution. Conflict in itself is not bad at all as people learn from it if properly managed.

This study reviewed literatures on conflict and its management. While some have conducted research on the impacts of conflict on institutions of higher learning as well as the management for effective productivity, attention has not been given to extant literatures to examine conflict and its management in Ekiti state University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State. This study therefore seeks to fill the lacuna.

Statement of the problem

For the successful development of any nation, education is very important (Bano, 2015; Kirui, Wamukuru and Flora, 2022). However, conflict has caused a lot of harm to the educational system especially in higher institutions. In past years, conflicts arising between the unions of the institution and the State Government mostly do end up in strike which affects the students' academic progress due to the period of the strike, wastage of time and energy in solving the conflicts by the institution and the State Government. Likewise, institutional stress on the

management and staff, wastage of finance when activities are disrupted and facilities or equipment are being destroyed in the course of it. Persistent conflict that could be complex and assume very dangerous dimension which could even lead to death and so many more are inclusive.

There is the need for proper management or else the issue of this conflict will continue and also bastardize the education and image of the school. Therefore, there is a need to pinpoint and address those various causes of conflict in Ekiti State University, Ado - Ekiti, Ekiti State and also proffer recommendations so as to restructure the academic sector from incessant strike actions arising from these conflicts. Consequently, this article examined causes of conflict and its management in Ekiti State University Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The theory sees individual or group to be a focal point of conflict (Chiu, 2009). The realist theory argues that the selfish, personal and individualistic interests in humans in the pursuit of scarce resources to satisfy competitive interest among the stakeholders give rise to the expression of conflict. Furthermore the theory agrees that political factors have a role and function, and where these stakeholders pursue their own interest and self-protection it leads to conflict. The theory concludes that outcome here results into a clash of interest, thus promoting industrial conflict.

According to the realist school of thought, The Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti is not left out. There have been conflict in the institution and the common ones arises between the management and workers' union; that is the Academic Staff Union and Non-Academic staff Union of the university, management and students, and management and students' union. In respect to the realistic conflict theory, unions always engage in conflict when due salary and allowances are not paid which can be due to scarce resources. Recently, the academic body particularly said some academic staff of the university was allegedly receiving double salaries, while some were given undue accelerated promotions or employed by the Vice-Chancellor without following due process.

In recent times, there has been agitation by the unions as regards the poor state of infrastructure, student's welfare, wrong academic patronage, financial mismanagement, among others being in the institution. Recruitment of staffs of both the academic and non-academic unions which are not qualified for the positions given due to religiosity and connections; and people due for retirement but refuses to retire are all part of the problems that falls under allocation of resources which are limited as cause of the conflict which can be related to the realistic theory. According

to Realistic Conflict Theory, positive relations can only be restored if superordinate goals are in place.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey method which describes the characteristics of the population or phenomenon that is being studied through the administration of questionnaire. Collection of data through the use of open and closed ended questionnaire, gathered information on past events, experiences and progressive turn was done. The study adopted random sampling technique. This ensured that the people that were randomly selected represented the entire population of the two unions in the University under this study. This ensured that all study population had equal chance of being selected and sampled.

In carrying out this research, the sample size of this study is gotten from a simple fraction of 10% (203) staff were selected as the sample size from Academic staff and non-academic staff in the university. The data for this study was collected from two sources, which are: primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data such as questionnaire was employed in this study. The questionnaire was administered to the staff of the university under this case study. Also the questionnaire was structured to be closed and open ended to get more information directly from the affected respondents. Secondary source of data collected were through relevant textbooks, journals, newspapers, and internet documents.

Descriptive statistics under quantitative data analysis was used to analyze collected data with the use of frequency distribution and percentile (%). In addition, the open ended questionnaire was deciphered for meaningful analysis and interpretation. For this study a total of two hundred and three (203) questionnaires were administered to the respondents and one hundred and eighty-six (186) were duly completed and returned representing (91.6%). The results were analyzed and interpreted in the order in which they are enlisted in the research objectives.

Causes of conflict in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

This session identified and examined the causes of conflicts in the public institution of which EKSU was used as the case study. The table 1 below presents the following parameters on causes of conflict amongst staff and management. The analysis revealed that 61.8% strongly agreed, 31.7% agreed that late payment of remunerations was one of the causes of conflict in the institution with 0.5% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, 4.3% disagreed while 1.3% strongly disagreed. However, from this analysis, it could be concluded that (93.5%) of the respondents agreed it is late payment of remunerations. In other to back this point up, from the open ended questionnaire filled by the respondents, they also attested that late

payment of salary and retirement benefits causes conflict in the institution.

The result in Table 1 also revealed that 34.9% strongly agreed, 50.4% agreed that there was communication gap between the staff and university management as a cause of conflict while 3.2% of the respondents were undecided to the claim. In addition, 8.6% of the respondent disagreed and 2.7% strongly disagreed. Notwithstanding, (85.4%) majority of the respondents agreed that communication gap between the staff and university management is one of the causes of conflict. In addition to this, lack of information as and when needed by the staff are not properly disseminated for effective and efficient running of the institution according to the information gotten from the open ended questionnaire. Also, due to the communication gap amongst the staff and management of the institution, the staff feels that the university is not paying attention to their needs.

The assertion that management style of leadership such as authoritarianism, democratic, laissez faire is one of the causes of conflict from the table below revealed that 45.2% strongly agree and 31.7% agreed. While, 8.6% disagreed and 5.4% strongly disagreed. However, it could be indicated from the statement that (76.9%) of the respondents agreed that the kind of management style of leadership e.g. authoritarianism, democratic, laissez faire contribute to conflict.

Similarly, it could be seen from Table 1 below that 37.6% strongly agreed and 37.1% agreed to the assertion that the work policies and practices put in place are not favorable which leads to conflict with 8.6% of the respondents undecided, while 12.9% disagreed and 3.8% strongly disagreed with the statement. However, the analysis below showed that majority of the respondents (74.7%) agreed that the working policies and practices put in place is the cause of conflict.

In a different statement, it was asserted that inadequate allocation of resources contributes to the cause of conflict in the institution. In response to this, 45.7% strongly agreed and 35.5% agreed while 5.9% were undecided to this claim. 6.5% disagreed and 6.5% also strongly disagreed to this assertion. This further revealed that (81.2%) of the respondents agreed that inadequate allocation of resources has spurred up conflict in the institution.

In the same vein, item 6 in table showed that 43.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that poor availability of facilities and equipment in the institution has been one of the causes of conflict with 41.4% agreeing to it whereby 7.5% were undecided. 4.3% disagreed with the statement and 3.2% strongly

disagreed. In respect to the analysis of this statement, (84.9%) of them believed that poor availability of facilities and equipment in the institution is a cause of conflict.

Furthermore, item 7, inappropriate appointment of members of academic and non-academic staff to higher positions as a cause of conflict revealed that 41.4% of the respondents who strongly agreed and 36.6% agreed. Nevertheless, 10.8% of the respondents disagreed with the assertion and 1.1% strongly disagreed with this statement. In other words, a total of (78%) agree to this statement as a cause of conflict.

Another cause of conflict as strongly agreed by 36.0% and agreed by 39.2% of the respondents is differences in values of individuals with 9.1% of the respondents undecided, 10.8% disagreed and 4.8% strongly disagreed. The total respondents that agreed with this assertion is (75.2%). Moreover, 36.0% of the respondents strongly agreed and 34.4% agreed to the statement that there is little correlation between job performance and economic reward respectively with 9.7% undecided. Furthermore, 15.6% disagreed and 4.3% strongly disagreed to this statement, In all,

(70.4%) of the respondents in total agreed to this statement.

In addition to this, the result of the analysis in item 11 revealed that 37.1% of the respondents strongly agreed to the assertion that there were arbitrary and confusing standards for promotion, wages and benefits by the management in the institution. 38.7% also agreed with 7.0% undecided, while 14.0% disagreed and 3.2% strongly disagreed that there were arbitrary and confusing standards by the management. However, majority of the respondents (75.8%) agreed that there were arbitrary and confusing standards for promotion, wages and benefits.

Lastly, the analysis from item 12 deduced that 45.2% and 31.2% strongly agreed and agreed respectively that refusal of management to honour the demands of the staff has contributed to the cause of conflict with 6.5% undecided while 10.8% and 6.5% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. However, majority of the respondents (76.4%) agreed that the refusal of management to honour the demands of the staff has constituted to one of the causes of conflict in the institution.

Table 1: Causes of conflict amongst staff and management of Ekiti State University

Items	Strongly Agree N (%)	Agree N (%)	Undecided N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Strongly Disagree N (%)
Late payment of remunerations	115(61.8)	59(31.7)	1(0.5)	8(4.3)	3(1.6)
Communication gap between the staff and university management	65(34.9)	94(50.5)	6(3.2)	16(8.6)	5(2.7)
The kind of management style of leadership e.g. authoritarianism, democratic, laissez faire	84(45.2)	59(31.7)	17(9.1)	16(8.6)	10(5.4)
Work policies and practices put in place	70(37.6)	69(37.1)	16(8.6)	24(12.9)	7(3.8)
Inadequate allocation of resources	85(45.7)	66(35.5)	11(5.9)	12(6.5)	12(6.5)
Poor availability of facilities and equipment in the institution	81(43.5)	77(41.4)	14(7.5)	8(4.3)	6(3.2)
Inappropriate appointment of members of academic and non-academic staff to higher positions	77(41.4)	68(36.6)	19(10.2)	20(10.8)	2(1.1)
Differences in values of individuals	67(36.0)	73(39.2)	17(9.1)	20(10.8)	9(4.8)
Little correlation between job performance and economic reward	67(36.0)	64(34.4)	18(9.7)	29(15.6)	8(4.3)
Arbitrary and confusing standards for promotion, wages and benefit	69(37.1)	72(38.7)	13(7.0)	26(14.0)	6(3.2)
Refusal of management to honor the demands of the staff	84(45.2)	58(31.2)	12(6.5)	20(10.8)	12(6.5)

Source: Field Survey N=186

Relative importance index (RII) for the responses collated on what the causes of conflict amongst staff and management of Ekiti State University

The Table 2 gives the rank of the parameters stated in the Table 1 above. The relative important index (RII) as calculated:

$$RII = \frac{\sum W}{A}$$

W= Total weight of response
A= Highest weight of response (A= 5)

N= Total number of respondents (N=186)

From the result gotten in the Table 2, it revealed what the primary causes of the conflicts amongst the staff and management is. These major causes are late payment of remunerations, communication gap between the staff and university management and poor availability of facilities and equipment in the institution.

Table 2: Relative Importance Index (RII)

Items	Σ W	Mean	RII	Rank
Late payment of remunerations	833	4.478	0.896	1
Communication gap between the staff and university management	777	4.177	0.835	2
The kind of management style of leadership e.g. authoritarianism, democratic, laissez faire	749	4.027	0.805	6
Work policies and practices put in place	729	3.919	0.784	9
Inadequate allocation of resources	756	4.065	0.813	4
Poor availability of facilities and equipment in the institution	758	4.075	0.815	3
Inappropriate appointment of members of academic and non-academic staff to higher positions	756	4.065	0.813	4
Differences in values of individuals	727	3.908	0.782	10
Little correlation between job performance and economic reward	711	3.823	0.765	11
Arbitrary and confusing standards for promotion, wages and benefit	730	3.925	0.785	8
Refusal of management to honor the demands of the staff	740	3.978	0.796	7

Source: Field Survey N=186

DISCUSSION

Conflicts are situations that cannot be avoided in any organization which includes the educational setting. In reality, it has been a bane in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. As asserted in this study, payment of remunerations is a major cause of conflicts in tertiary institutions, in otherwords; it is referred as a state of conflict interest where the focus of employees is not in line with management (Ghaffar, 2019). Osabiya (2015) and Ndum and Okey (2013) alluded to this same factor; however, they opined that it is as a result of scarce resources within the university system. Jajua and Fareo in their study titled Conflict management strategies in Ondo State tertiary institutions averred that a major cause of conflict in universities is lack of resources. This is not different from the assertion of Hotepo, Asokere, Abdul-Azeez and Ajemunigbohun (2010) in their study on effect of conflict on organizational performance. Lack of resources is no doubt paramount in the cause of conflicts in Nigeria Universities, where the entire tertiary institutions have been shut down due to strikes derived from poor remuneration and welfare of members' staff. Nonetheless, poor communication between management staff and employees was identified to be a contributory factor to conflicts in universities. It is a well-known fact that lack of communication results in gaps within a system and these gaps are often misconstrued by individuals to mean lack of sensitivity on the path of leadership of superiors. Furthermore, Ekundayo (2012) observed that lack of equipment for teaching and research have negatively affected academic institutions and led to inadequacies in tertiary education. In conclusion, lack or inadequate financial resources within the universities can be adduced to be a major cause of conflict in higher institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to ensure effective and efficient management of conflict. This asserts that solutions can be brought to any conflict in organisations when the causes are identified (Tonder, Havenga & Visagie).

The organization should always make sure that the staff gets their remunerations, i.e. salary, benefits and allowances at the right time as this is majorly the reason why conflicts always occur in the institution. The staff members were employed to provide services and get paid in return but when they are just rendering services without pay, they tend to get frustrated. For any organization that wants to perform effectively and efficiently, the employees have to be motivated to promote job performance. One of the ways that can be done is through payment of remunerations as and when due and resources should be allocated fairly to each stakeholders of the institution.

The management should communicate regularly with all stakeholders in the institution to know their needs and get suggesting ways of how the management can serve them better. Communication is the life wire of any organization and before conflict lead to damaging effect, if proper communication channel is out in place, it can curb or avoid conflict. Therefore, there should be effective and efficient form of dialogue amongst all stakeholders.

From the findings of this study, there are shortage of facilities and equipment in the institution. The management can do well to provide necessary facilities and equipment needed in the institution to promote God study and work environment. Likewise, the water factory facility should be managed effectively including all other available facilities and equipment in the institution.

CONCLUSION

Conflict is inherent and will always occur where people are gathered due to diverse human personalities, values, beliefs and norms. However, conflict in itself is good if it is well managed as it will foster good relationship positively and when not properly managed it can lead to negative effects that could be damaging emotionally and physically on the management, staff and students. As an institution, effective and efficient approaches to management of conflict need to be developed. Likewise, if there were proper management of conflict, it would avoid future and elongated conflict, prevent same conflicts from reoccurring for the progress of the institution and would enable the institution to develop effectively and efficiently.

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