



Conflict Management Strategies of University Administrators in Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the conflict management strategies of university administrators in Rivers State. The descriptive survey design was adopted and the population comprised 357 university administrators. This includes Vice-Chancellors, Heads of Faculties, Head of Departments, and Heads of Administrative Departments of universities in Rivers State. Consequently, two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Thus, purposive random sampling was used 357. The instrument is titled, “Conflict Management Strategies of University Administrators Questionnaire (CMSUAQ). The reliability coefficient of 0.78 was calculated using the test-retest method. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer research questions while the hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance using the z-test. Findings of the study revealed that conflict in Rivers State University occurs as a result of non-payment of salaries, imposition of the decision on employees by management, denial of rights and privileges, non - implementation of Government circulars on staff welfare, communication gap between the authorities and workers and refusal to honor the agreement reached with the workers union. The strategies utilized by university administrators in conflict management were dialogue, avoidance, mediation, and prevention. There was no significant difference between the conflict management strategies of males and females as well as federal and state university administrators. It was recommended that university administrators should effectively communicate with the workers to keep them abreast of an event in the institution, adopt dialogue and avoidance in managing conflicts and ensure prompt payment of workers’ salaries in addition to honoring and implementing an agreement reached with the workers

Keywords: conflict management, university administrators, workers

INTRODUCTION

Educational is the bedrock for national development and university education remains the most crucial component in human capital development. Therefore, university education can be considered as a platform on which the future development of a nation rests (Anyim, 2012). No meaningful development can take place in any nation of the world without the proper functioning of university education. This is because the provision of needed human and material resources for the production process depends on the university education system, mostly in this era of global advancement in science and technology. Despite the enormous benefits derived from university education in nation-building, Nigerian universities had over the years witnessed different types of conflicts from time to time which disrupts normal academic activities leading to delay in the completion of programs by students. When conflict occurs in the university system, the aggrieved parties usually workers or students always resort to the use of strike actions to press home their demands.

Hocker & Wilmont (2011) defined conflict as a felt struggle between two or more interdependent individuals over perceived incompatible differences in beliefs, values, and goals, or over differences in

desires for esteem, control, and connectedness. Conflict refers to all forms of opposition, disagreement, internal discord friction, or quarrel between two or more parties and is a product of controversy in ideas or viewpoints mostly held by two or more individuals/groups (Adeyemi and Ekundayo, 2010). Conflict is usually manifested in the form of, strikes, protests, unrest, a boycott of lectures, demonstrations, aggression, and other destructive behaviors. In the educational sector, conflicts affect the proper functioning of the system by disrupting academic activities' leading to a prolonged university academic calendar. In severe cases, it leads to the closing down of schools and the loss of lives. Conflict in the educational system harms parents, students, and even the government. The delays in the graduation of students as a result of strikes actions necessitated by a conflict between authorities in the university system give extra financial burden on parents as they are compelled to pay fees in addition to additional years spent by the students.

Although in the university educational system, conflict may bring both positive and negative outcomes. Hamayum, Wei, Muhammad, Khan & Attia (2014) however highlighted the positive consequences of conflict for the academic departments as helping to "define issues, resolve issues, increase group cohesion, establish alliances with other groups, and keep faculty alert to one another's interests". It also helps in developing organizational effectiveness, development, improving creativity and job quality in a group. Conflict within teams helps in improving financial performance, strategic planning, decision quality, and organizational development.

The conflict has been classified in many ways. Ibukun (1997) For instance, classified conflict into interpersonal, intra-personal, inter-group, and intra-group. The interpersonal or inter-group conflict occurs when the conflict takes the form of open actions such as hostile reactions, strikes actions, etc against another person or persons or group. However, until the hostile feeling is acted upon, it remains at the level of intra-personal problem. In another perspective, Ndum (2013) classified conflicts into three categories as conflict due to hierarchy of position conflict based on the relationship between the objective state of affairs and perceived state of affairs by conflicting parties and thirdly, conflict based on the antagonistic source such as conflict based on cultural values and institutional expectations.

Conflict is a natural phenomenon and attendant feature of human interaction which is inevitable in any organization or society. Alabi (2002) maintained that it is unrealistic and impossible to completely eradicate conflict within the university system. From the above evidence, conflicts need to be properly managed to retain their positive aspect and improve job satisfaction. A poorly managed conflict does not only affect the length of time the students spend in the universities with the attendant financial burden on parents, but it also affects the image of the universities within the global context. Arguing in support of this assertion, The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund maintains that conflicts when not dealt with constructively often explode into violence (UNICEF, 1995). Reasoning in the same direction, Ndum & Stella-Maris (2013) emphasized the need for all groups to recognize various potentials and make deliberate concerted efforts to curtail negative consequences of conflict.

In a nutshell, proper management of conflict at the early stage is very essential in averting negative consequences that may lead to the complete breakdown of the system. Proper understanding of the different strategies for managing and resolving conflict is very essential to avoid associated problems and enhance academic productivity. Different strategies have to be utilized or identified for the effective management of conflicts in organizations. These strategies include suppression, smoothing, avoiding, compromise, third-party intervention, cooperation, democratic process, job rotation as well as confrontation as conflict management strategies (Hodge & Anthony, 1991).

Statement of the Problem

Conflict is inevitable in any human organization because of differences in perception, opinion, ideas, desires, and others. Therefore, it becomes imperative that every educational institution must always devise means of managing these conflicts as they arise to ensure the smooth administration of the institution. It has been observed that Rivers State University has often been beleaguered with a series of conflicts between the academic staff and university administrators, students and academic staff, students, and university authorities which results in strike actions that disruption of academic activities and prolong

the academic calendar. Furthermore, apart from the financial burden of paying extra fees on parents, the students are bound to spend additional years in their program of study. This constitutes a problem that affects both parents and students as well as hampers the effective administration of the university system. Despite the adverse consequences of conflict, evidence from available studies shows that there, is no information on how university administrators in Rivers State manage conflict. It, therefore, becomes necessary to assess the various measures put in place by the university administrators geared toward eradicating conflicts in Rivers State University which is this study

Purpose of the Study

This study was carried out to examine the conflict management strategies of university administrators at Rivers State University. Specifically, the study examined:

1. Causes of conflict in Rivers State Universities.
2. Strategies for conflict management in Rivers State Universities.

Research Questions

1. What are the causes of conflict in Rivers State Universities?
2. What strategies do universities administrators adopt in managing conflict in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

HO1: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female universities administrators on conflict management strategies in Rivers State.

HO2: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of federal and state university administrators on conflict management strategies in Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey design was adopted in this study. The population comprised of 357 university administrators which include Vice-Chancellors, Heads of Faculties, Head of Departments, Heads of Administrative Departments in two state universities, and one federal university in Rivers State. The sample was 357 university administrators selected by purposive sampling technique. The instrument was titled, “Conflict Management Strategies of University Administrators Questionnaire (CMSUAQ) developed by the researcher and rated on a 4- point scale, Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). 357 copies of questionnaires were administered and retrieved 127 (95%) for the analysis of research questions and hypotheses.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: *What are the causes of conflict in Rivers State Universities?*

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Responses of University Administrators on causes of Conflict in Rivers State. (N=127).

S/N	Causes of Conflict	Mean	SD	Rank	Decision
1.	Non-payment of salaries as and when due	3.20	0.98	1 st	Accepted
2.	Sudden change in University policies	2.15	0.77	8 th	Rejected
3.	Imposition of decisions on employees by management	2.56	1.01	5 th	Accepted
4.	Inadequate amenities such as electricity and water	1.45	0.67	9 th	Rejected
5.	Denial of rights and privileges	2.98	0.85	Tnd	Accepted
6.	Non-implementation of staff welfare packages	2.56	0.76	10 th	Accepted
7.	Strong allegations of corruption against management	2.23	0.84	7,1,	Rejected
8.	Communication gap between the authorities and workers	3.10	0.63	ond	Accepted
9.	High-handedness on the part of management	2.40	0.97	6 th	Rejected
10.	Refusal of management to honour agreements reached with workers' union	2.87	1.10	4 rd	Accepted

(N = 127)

From Table 1, the causes of conflict in Rivers State are non-payment of salaries as and when due 3.20, imposition of the decision on employees by management 2.56, denial of rights and privileges 2.98, non-implementation of staff welfare packages 2.56, communication gap between the authorities and workers 3.10 and refusal to honor the agreement reached with workers union 2.87. However, nonpayment of salaries was ranked 1st, and imposition of the decision on employees ranked 5th based on the findings.

Research Question 2: *What strategies do universities administrators adopt in managing conflict in Rivers State?*

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of University Administrators' Responses on Conflict Management Strategies.

S/no	Conflict Management Strategies	Mean	SD	Rank	Decision
1	Dialogue	3.24	0.98	1 st	Accepted
2	Force	1.00	0.76	9*	Rejected
3	Emergency	2.12	0.84	Tth	Rejected
4	Admin. Effectiveness	2.43	0.51	4 th	Rejected
5	Avoidance	2.98	0.69	Ond	Accepted
6	Negligence	1.56	0.55	8 th	Rejected
7	Mediation	2.54	0.87	5 th	Accepted
8	Prevention	2.68	0.76	Trd	Accepted
9	Participatory Decision making	2.57	0.93	6 th	Accepted

(N = 127)

From Table 2, the strategies adopted by university administrators' in managing conflict in Rivers State Universities with their mean response are dialogue 3.24, avoidance 2.98, mediation 2.54, and prevention 2.68, and participatory decision making 2.57. However, the dialogue was ranked 1st and mediation ranked 5th based on the findings.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female universities administrators on conflict management strategies in Rivers State.

Table 3: z-test Analysis of the Mean Responses of Male and Female University Administrators on Conflict Management Strategies in Rivers State.

Gender	N	\bar{X}	Sd	Df	St. error	z-cal	z-crit	Sig. level	Decision
Male	84	2.48	0.652	125	0.0056	1.256	1.960	0.05	Accepted
Female	43	2.9	0.693						

From Table 3, z-cal = 1.256 which is less than z-crit. = 1.960. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in mean responses between male and female university administrators on conflict management strategies in Rivers State Universities was accepted. This means that there is no significant difference between male and female university administrators' conflict management strategies in Rivers State Universities.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of federal and state university administrators on conflict management strategies in Rivers State.

Table 4: z-test Analysis of the Mean Responses of Federal and State University Administrators on conflict Management Strategies in Rivers State

Gender	N	\bar{X}	Sd	Df	St. error	zcal	z-crit	Sig. level	Decision
Male	84	2.39	0.762						
				125	0.0045	0.983	1.960	0.05	Accepted
Female	43	2.32	0.712						

From the table, z-cal. = 0.983 is less than z-crit = 1.960. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of federal and state university administrators on conflict management strategies in Rivers State was accepted. This means that there is no significant difference between federal and state university administrators' conflict management strategies in Rivers State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Results from Table 1 showed that conflict occurs in Rivers State Universities as a result of nonpayment of salaries as and when, imposition of the decision on employees by management, denial of rights and privileges, non -implementation of Government circulars on staff welfare, communication gap between authorities and workers and refusal to honor the agreement reached with the workers union. The results of this study agree with the findings of Adeyemi et al (2012) where communication gap and non-implementation of government circular on staff welfare were found to be the causes of conflict in universities in their independent studies on assessment of conflicts in Nigerian universities, proper communication is an indispensable tool utilized by university administrators for smooth and effective day to day running of the institution. Students and staff of the institution need to be given an update on unfolding events to give them a sense of belonging. It is evident from the above, that the existing communication gap between university authorities and workers found in this study is unhealthy for the university system because when workers and even students are not properly informed of the unfolding events, mostly the ones regarding their welfare, it will create doubt in their minds leading to suspicion and distrust. At this level, any step or action was taken by the management will be seen as an attempt to undermine them.

The results from Table 2, showed that the most preferred conflict management strategy of university administrators in Rivers State was dialogue. Other strategies adopted were avoidance, mediation, and prevention. The results of this study support the findings of Olayele, & Arogundade (2013) Arop, Owan & Ekpang (2018) where avoidance and dialogue were some of the strategies adopted by university administrators in South-West Nigeria and Obubara Local Government Area of Cross River State respectively to manage conflict in their universities. Alabi (2002) maintained that it is unrealistic and impossible to completely eradicate conflict within the university system. Therefore, a combination of dialogue and avoidance will help to avert the negative consequences of conflict.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that Evidence from the results of this study revealed non-payment of salaries as and when, imposition of the decision on employees by management, denial of rights and privileges, non -implementation of Government circulars on staff welfare, communication gap between the authorities and workers, and refusal to honour the agreement reached with workers union were the causes of conflict in Rivers State Universities. Dialogue and avoidance, avoidance, mediation, and prevention were strategies

of managing conflicts by university administrators' in Rivers State. There was a significant difference between the conflict management strategies of males and females as well as federal and state university administrators.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made based on the evidence from this study.

1. University administrators should effectively communicate with the works to keep them abreast of events in the institution.
2. University administrators should always adopt dialogue and avoidance in managing conflicts

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