

An Assessment of the Management of Conflict in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

The study assessed the management of conflict in Nigerian Universities with a view to identifying the causes of conflict. It also examined the styles for handling conflict in Nigerian universities. This was necessitated by the need to have well-designed strategies to manage industrial conflict in Nigerian Universities.

The study discovered evidences of mismanagement of conflict which made most conflicts in the universities violent. It observed that most conflict in Nigerian universities might have been averted if the management could be more sensitive and flexible in crisis periods.

The study recommended that the welfare of staff and students should be given more attention if perennial conflicts with school management are to be overcome in Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Styles; Conflict Management; Crisis Resolution

Introduction

Background to the Study

Conflict functions where there are two or more persons in a group and where the managers have to deal with people lives, ego and sense of mission or purpose. No human organization is immune to conflicts. Nigerian universities as a social organization do experience conflicts between different unions within its jurisdiction. Conflict is therefore an inevitable phenomenon in any organization (Adebayo, 2009).

Recent social political uncertainties coupled with the typical institution problems in Nigeria as a

whole have been the bane of the crises in the Nigeria Universities. Evidences abound to show that since the advent of military government in Nigeria in January, 1966 there have been series or disagreement between the government and the university management owing largely subtle incursion into the autonomy of the latter by the former. (Olaiya, 2000: 5-6).

In the foregoing, the universities have continued to exist and operate under a lot of restrictions and encroachments from the state which in turn form the bedrock of the mounting conflict in most Nigerian universities.

Similarly, these various crises often centre on the issue of deprivation of rights and the neglect of staff and student welfare among others (Olaiya, 2006:8).

Therefore, this study set out to assess the management of conflict in Nigeria Universities and styles of handling conflicts by the authority.

Statement of the Problem

Conflict which degenerate into violence in most cases have become regular features between staffs, students and management in Nigerian universities.

Going down the memory lane, one observes that almost all universities in Nigeria witnessed unrest at one time or the other. Since 1948, when the premier university (now University of Ibadan) was established problem of violent protests have been assuming a spiraling increase (Olaiya, 2008:9)



Madunagu (1980) listed twenty-one major students' crises in Nigeria between 1948 and 1979.

Several others have been taken place since 1979 to date. A number of steps had been taken by these universities to reduce the frequency of conflicts. Despite all these conflict still occur frequently.

It is against this background problems and the research for solutions to the hydra-headed crises be devilling our various universities that this study assessed the management of conflict in Nigerian universities.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are to

- i. assess the management of conflict in Nigerian universities.
- ii. identify the causes of conflict in Nigerian universities.
- iii. examine the styles for handling conflict in Nigerian universities.
- iv. recommend solutions to ameliorate the incidence of conflict in Nigerian Universities.

Significance of the study

The study is significant because it will guide the government in policy decision regarding conflict management and resolution in Nigeria Universities. The university governing council and administration is expected to benefit immensely from the findings of the study as they will be enabling factors of conflict in their universities and integrate these towards the formulation of policies of conflict resolution.

Moreover, this study will contribute very useful contribution to modern literature on higher education university governance and conflict analysis.

Literature Review

Conflict is a natural phenomenon and its occurrence in communities where human beings exist is inevitable. Conflict is also an inherent feature that cannot be underrated in every organization. This is because it can make or mar the survival, growth and progress of an organization (Adegoroye, 2004:1).

Coser (1964) defined conflict as “a struggle over values and claims to scarce resources, power and status in which the aims of opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals”.

In this vein, conflict has been further described as phenomenon of opposition, disagreement or a struggle between people with different ideas or belief. A general form of conflict can also be seen as arising from disputes or disagreement or contest over limited resources or interests, which are dissappropriately distributed or served; or as struggle for self recognition, emancipation and autonomy and such other cases that could be set the interests of an individual or group of individuals against each other cases that could set the interest of an individual or group of individuals against each other (Olaiya 2000: 27-28).

Sanda (1991) asserted that conflict has been seen in the most extreme terms of “acute stress” anxiety or chronic tension or “death for a diseased person, social system or historical process. He also stressed that crisis management in universities demands appropriate leadership style of the school administrator or chief executive.

Bloisi (2007) opined that conflict is a disagreement between two or more parties who perceive that they have incompatible concerns. To him, individuals, groups, departments, organizations, countries etc, do experience conflict whenever an action by one party is perceived as preventing or interfering with the goals, needs or actions of another.

Hiss (1992) contended that conflict, like sex, is an essential creative element in human relationships. It is the means to a change, the means by which our social values of welfare, security, justice and opportunity for personal development can be achieved.

Conflicts in the Nigerian Universities

Conflicts have made management of universities in Nigeria to be the spotlight throughout the country. Universities conflicts in Nigeria are a phenomenon of great concern. The chaotic situation has undermined many programmes



aimed at enhancing the impartation of knowledge and skills in the future human resources for the country (Fatile and Adejuwon, 2011).

Adeyemi et al (2010) observed that crisis is becoming more rampant in the universities and the resultant consequence has been to the detriment of the administration, teaching – learning atmosphere.

Gboyega (1997) agreed that crisis continues to escalate in the university due to government and institutional authorities management in efficiency. He argued further that since most of the crises of students are demand-bearing traditional authority of the university, tampering with the academic freedom of university, overt favoritism on the part of the school authority towards centre interest group etc are less likely to foster any useful solution.

Moreover, most violent conflicts have been traced to contested bases of citizenship rights, greed, predatory rule autocracy and unresolved grievances (Oloyede, 1999).

Mialet. al. (1960) grouped the roots of conflicts into five major types which are:

- (a) Differences in people's background;
- (b) Differences in values, ideals, objectives and religion;
- (c) Differences in age;
- (d) Differences in interest; and
- (e) Differences growing out of power structure.

According to Agbonnaet.al. (2009), many unresolved conflicts in Nigerian universities are the crises of unsettled industrial agreement between the Federal Government and the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASSU).

Adeyemiet. al (2010) noted the causes students' crises in tertiary institutions, include wide communication gap between the students and the school authority; delay meeting students' demand by the school authority to guarantee security of lives and properties; inadequate facilities such as lecture rooms, laboratories and equipment; drastic and obnoxious rules and regulations; students reaction to harsh government policies; frustration and uncertainty

from the larger society; academic stress; students' non-involvements in decisions that concern their welfare; student being forced to pay a special fee etc.

Religious fundamentalism and ethnicity have become major causes of conflicts in Nigerian institutions (Uwazie, Albert &Uzoigwe, 1999). They further stated that these two have resulted in protracted disharmony in Nigerian Universities.

Styles of Handling Conflict in Nigerian Universities

Follet (2001) pointed out three main ways of dealing with conflict: domination, compromise and integration. To her, other ways of handling conflict in organizations included avoidance and suppression.

Thomas (2000) considered the intention of a party (cooperatives i.e. attempting to satisfy the other party's concerns and assertiveness i.e., attempting to satisfy one own concerns) to be of importance when classifying the modes of handling conflict.

According to Prutt and Carnevale (2000), dual – concern mode (concern for self and concern for others) are four styles of handing conflict. They are: yielding, problem solving inaction and contending.

Mohr aandSpekman (2004) advocated for six techniques: (1) Joints problem solving (2) smoothing (3) persuasion, (4) domination (5) withdrawal and (6) arbitration.

Magugula (2007) articulated three styles of handling peaceful crisis resolution among warring parties: mediation, arbitration and reconciliation. He argued further that each of the approaches could be used by universities to resolve conflict among the between aggrieved parties.

Ojo (2006) listed various ways of crisis resolution as problem – solving; prevention and avoidance' expansion of opportunities and the behavior of people involved in conflict through conscious appeal; behaviour modification better communication; reduction of mistrust through dialogue and improved human relation; changing

the structure of the organization and compromise and agreement style.

Aluede (2001) recommended among other things greater involvement of students in decision-making processes as a way of reducing conflict in Nigeria Universities.

Olaiya (2001:67-69) compared the leadership styles of two former vice chancellors of Obafemi Awolowo University (Prof. Wande Abimbola and Prof. Wale Omole). He argued that Abimbola used democratic style of leadership while Omole employed autocratic style of leadership. This he stressed contributed to Prof. Abimbola's success as vice chancellor of Obafemi Awolowo University.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was established that there are many causes of conflict in Nigerian universities. For instance management inefficiency, autocratic leadership style, ethnicity, religious sentiment, unresolved grievances, greediness, wide communication gap between the students and management, drastic and obnoxious rules and regulations, inadequate facilities, insecurities of lives and properties etc. constitute hindrances to conflict resolution in Nigerian universities.

Moreover, it has been observed that there is a rising spate of violent conflicts in Nigerian universities. This can impede education development of Nigeria.

Finally, the welfare and aspiration of the staffs and students deserve more attention. A perennial conflict with school authority is to be overcome in Nigerian universities.

Recommendations

From the findings of the study, these following recommendations are inferable:

1. There should be open and timely communication between the leaders and the led.
2. School authorities should be more democratic in handling staffs and students' affairs.
3. Vice chancellor should persuade and dialogue with aggrieved parties.

4. When conflict arises, management should focus more on preventive strategies in order to reduce crisis in schools rather than curative measures.

5. Decision making should be collective when possible.

6. Furthermore, government should provide essential services and revitalize the existing ones in our various universities.

7. Finally, students should always exercise caution and restraint to adopt confrontational approach to issues that could have been handled through consultation.

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