

Dialogue and Confrontation as Unions-University Conflict Resolution Strategies and Universities' Administration in Benue State

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Abstract

This study examined dialogue and confrontation as unions-university conflict resolution strategies and universities' administration in Benue State. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a survey design. The population was 40,139 academic staff union of universities, students and non-academic staff union from two public universities in Benue State. The sample size was 381 respondents using Glenn sampling size determination formula through multi-stage sampling procedure. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled: "Dialogue and Confrontation as Unions'-University Conflict Resolution Strategies and Administration of Universities Questionnaire" (DCUUCRSAUQ) with reliability coefficient of 0.83. The data collected were subjected to mean and standard deviation to answer research questions and one sample-test was used to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that dialogue and confrontation have significant influence on administration of universities. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that authorities of universities should dialogue with staff in order to resolve conflicts in their universities for effective administration. Also conflicting parties should use the democratic norms of confrontation, due process, fairness and express their mind during confrontation.

Keywords: dialogue, confrontation, unions, university, conflict, resolution

Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in any interactive situation involving human beings and it is ubiquitous at all levels of human social systems. Conflicts abound when there are conflicting objectives, methods, philosophies, or missions and the desire of managers to protect jurisdictions, control resources or acquire power. Conflicts arise when domains are established and expanded or when they are defended against erosion or attack.

Unions' conflicts have been prevailing in Nigerian university education system. The Nigerian universities have been experiencing unions' conflict from time immemorial. The frequent conflicts between Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Non-Academic Staff Unions (NASU) and Students' Union Government (SUG) have been of great concern to many Nigerian universities. Nigerian university system has been in a high state of anxiety and frequent conflict of different types and intensity.

The complexity of the universities is further heightened by the type of unions that exists within the system. Universities are organizations where unions are heterogeneous unlike most organizations. In universities there are four distinct types of unions namely, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU), Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) and Students Union Government (SUG). Each of these bodies protects the interests of its members namely ASUU for academic staff, SSANU for senior non-academic staff, NASU for junior staff and SUG for students. Therefore, whenever there is any grouse between unions and either the university management or government, there has to be negotiations between government/university and each of these organized unions in the system.

Nigerian universities have for decades been faced with so many conflicts between academic staff and university administrators, students versus academic staff, students versus university authorities, non-academic staff versus university administrators, and the manner in which these conflicts are resolved have given serious problems in administration of universities. For decades, these conflicts have given rise to distrust and hostility among staff; academic staff, senior non-academic staff and junior non-academic staff and students; thus contributing to hampering smooth, effective and efficient attainment of the goals and objectives of university education in Nigeria. Sometimes, this conflict led to revolts, protests, unrests and violence and result to closure of universities in Nigeria where students are lost to foreign universities (Adeyemi, Ekundayo & Alonge, 2010).

Academic staff unions of universities (ASUU) is always engaged in intractable industrial impasse over what ASUU considers generally as its employer's (government) inability to provide the funding requirements for the revitalization of Nigeria's ailing public universities. Other issues of particular interest to ASUU include poor wages, deplorable conditions of services, university autonomy and academic freedom. ASUU considers the failure of government to meet these requirements as a result of government's insensitivity and lack of political will to provide the priority needs of the education sector in general and university education in particular. For the government, ASUU makes unrealistic and unjustifiable demands in utter disregard to the needs of other sectors and unions.

The non-academic staff who performs support functions might feel unappreciated by both the academics and students. The administrators might also clash with students and staff in carrying out their functions of recruitment, admission, examination and provision of welfare services for the staff and students; the academics have a complex dual role of

teaching and research. The two, though reinforce one another, could be a source of much tension over the individual's division of time, energy and commitment (Alabi, 2010).

Similarly, the students' union government (SUG), perhaps, is the most complex of all. As a heterogeneous group, they have conflicts within themselves. Yet they have to conform to learning certain things in order to acquire a degree. In contrast, this is the burning desire of 'angry' late adolescents not only to belong to the world, but also to reform it. This desire leads to a fierce challenge of accepted orthodox practices. It then becomes necessary to examine the result of activities such as disruption of university programmes, boycott of lectures, loss of lives and properties and closing down of the institutions (Sanda, 1992).

Conflict resolution strategies are those strategies used in limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of conflict. Peretomode (1995) states that conflict resolution strategies are those approaches which managers of organizations or school administrators use to modify or settle conflict between the parties involved. These include smoothing, forcing, detraction, encrapsulation, arbitration, majority rule, changing the individuals involved and restructuring the organization, and expansion of resource. Schmid in Peter (2016) defines conflict resolution as interference in an on-going conflict process in such a way as to contain and, if possible, to reduce the level of violence and destruction, to prevent the vertical escalation towards the use of weapons and mass destruction (WMD), and prevent the horizontal expansion into other areas.

However, observation by the researchers has indicated that there has been a serious and total neglect of the available strategies in resolving conflict in the Nigerian universities. This constitutes a challenge to the administration of the universities. Ibukun (1997) identifies dialogue as one of the conflict resolution strategies in Nigerian universities. The author states that dialogue is one of the primary components within the broader definition of peace building. The goal of dialogue is to develop joint approaches to conflict management as well as improve relationships, understanding, and trust between individuals or groups in conflict with one another. Adeyemi and Ademilua (2012) found that isolated dialogue as conflict resolution strategy is the best predictor of administrative effectiveness in the universities. Adeyemi and Ademilua further add that communication gap between management and workers were the leading cause of conflict in the universities.

Similarly, unions' conflict in the universities could be resolved through confrontation means (Peretomode, 1995). Confrontation has to do with the use of the police or military to reverse an objectionable situation. When both parties that are involved in the conflict refuse to come to compromise, the government may decide to use force in order to bring it under control. Omemiu and Oladunjoye (2013) also discovered that confrontation in resolving conflict in universities was favoured by post-graduate students. The findings also revealed that undergraduate students, academic staff and non-academic staff do not favour confrontation as conflict resolution strategy. Olulade (2005) also found that a

thorough diagnosis of conflict usually leads to the best possible solution for all the parties involved in conflict.

The universities can use creative approaches to enable two parties involved to resolve their differences through cooperation and team-building exercise. According to Peretomode (1995), the manager or university authority can use force as means of putting an end to the conflict. It appears to be the oldest and popularly used by administrators in the resolution of conflict. Instead of using force in university, management should simply resolve the conflict as it deems fit and communicates its decisions to the individuals or groups involved. Confrontation implies a problem solving for which both parties are interested in finding a mutually acceptable solution. This approach requires a give-and-take attitude between the parties, meaning that both are somewhat assertive and somewhat cooperative. It involves pinpointing the issue and resolving it objectively by defining the problem, gathering necessary information, generating and analyzing alternatives, and selecting the best alternative under the circumstances. Confrontation requires open dialogue between participants, who must be mature, understanding, and technically and managerially competent.

The dual concern theory which was propounded by Blake and Mouton in (1964) also identified five ways of handling conflict: withdrawing (low concern for both people and productivity), smoothing (high concern for people and low concern for productivity), forcing (low concern for people and high concern for productivity), problem solving (high concern for both people and productivity), and compromising (moderate concern for both people and productivity). The theory proposes that a party's desire to satisfy his or her own concerns (the level of assertiveness the party employs), as well as the desire to satisfy the other's concerns (the level of cooperation the party employs), will determine the behaviours used to pursue those concerns.

Administration of university is the extent to which the university system has been able to operate within the confines of their statutes in order to carry out their primary assignment of teaching and research (Ibiam, 2014). University administration involves planning, organizing, directing, controlling, coordinating and evaluating activities at achieving the goals of university. Administration is an effective organization and actualization of human and material resources in a particular system for the achievement of identified objectives.

The goal of university education is pursued through its main functions and activities of teaching, research, dissemination of existing and new information, services to the community, and being a store house of knowledge. In carrying out these functions, there are always conflicts within and among the categories of people within the university community, namely students, academics, administrators, non-academics and their unions. These categories of people have different purposes and expectations from university.

University as a social system comprises of many different kinds of people who inevitably disagree with each other on many dimensions thereby making conflict of various kinds

inevitable. For instance, students may disagree with their lecturer on assessment criteria and allocation of marks assigned to work. Likewise, lecturers in the department may also disagree with the departmental head or faculty dean on policy issues and their implementation. Conflict is what occurs when two or more parties have divergent interests over distribution of resources and/or issues touching on their development (Ibiam, 2014). It is what can come up in the event of staff and student's interactions. It can emanate from school administrative cadre. The interference must be deliberate and goal directed by, at least, one part.

The situation as described above seems to be what is happening in universities in Benue State. It seems that the various stakeholders in universities are not properly using the various conflict resolutions strategies in resolving conflict. They rather prefer to employ different methods which have culminated into poor administration of universities which sometimes lead to incessant strike by university staff, protest by students against university administration in Benue State. It is against this background that the researchers investigated unions-universities conflict resolution strategies and administration of universities in Benue State.

Statement of the Problem

Nigerian Universities have for decades given rise to distrust and hostility among staff; academic staff, senior staff and non-academic staff and students; thus contributing in hampering smooth, effective and efficient attainment of the goals and objectives of university education in Nigeria. Although university authorities have made efforts to combat conflict, the situation remains acute and has constituted a major challenge to achieving objectives of teaching and researching and has become a source of worry and central point of academic discourse.

The aspect of confronting the aggrieved parties in order to express their views on conflicting issues seems to be neglected by university stakeholders and this seems to lead to escalation of conflict in the universities thus hampering the effective planning, control, decision making and organization in the universities (Adeyemi, Ekundayo & Alonge, 2010). The problem of this study put in question form is: what is the influence of unions'-university conflict resolution strategies on administration of universities in Benue State?

Research questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. To what extent does dialogue as a unions-university conflict resolution strategy influence the administration of universities in Benue State?
2. To what extent does confrontation as a unions-university conflict resolution strategy influence the administration of universities in Benue State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

Ho1: Dialogue as a unions–university conflict resolution strategy has no significant influence on administration of universities in Benue State.

Ho2: Confrontation as a unions–university conflict resolution strategy has no significant influence on administration of universities in Benue State.

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. Descriptive design is one in which a group of people or items is studied by collecting and analyzing data from few people considered to be representative sample of the entire population (Emaikwu, 2011). The population of the study comprises all 40,139 respondents (35,960 students, 1,461 academic staff and 1,718 non-academic staff). The sample was 381 respondents selected for this study. This sample was considered appropriate for an approximate population of 40,139 using Glenn (2012) formula for determining sample size from a given population. Multistage sampling procedure was used to arrive at the sample size.

The instrument for the conduct of the research was a structured questionnaire titled: “Unions-Universities Conflict Resolution Strategies and Universities Administration Questionnaire” (UUCRSUAQ) with reliability coefficient of 0.83. The questionnaire was a four-point rating scale with response mode of Very High Extent (VHE)-4, High Extent (HE)-3, Low Extent (LE)-2 and Very Low Extent (VLE)-1. The instrument was validated by two experts in Test and Measurement and one expert in Educational Management in the Department of Educational Foundations, Benue State University Makurdi. The data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions and chi-square was used for testing the null hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

Presentation of results

Research Question 1: To what extent does dialogue as a unions-universities conflict resolution strategy influence the administration of universities?

Table 1: Mean scores for influence of dialogue as a unions-universities conflict resolution strategy on administration of universities

Item No.	Items Description	N	<i>x</i>	SD	Decision
1	With positive discussions among the university staff, decision making will be made easily.	381	3.08	0.99	HE
2	If staff engage in peaceful talk, decision making in the university will be made easy.	381	3.57	0.50	HE

3	When the conflicting parties engage in one on one discussion, decision making will not improve.	381	1.49	0.75	LE
4	Decision making is made easy when conflicting parties involved resolve their differences	381	3.54	0.64	VHE
5	Round table discussion with ASUU, Non-academic staff and students will make decision making easy	381	3.35	0.48	HE
			3.01	0.67	HE

Table 1 showed that the mean ratings of items 1-5 are 3.08, 3.57, 1.49, 3.54, and 3.35 respectively with the corresponding standard deviations of 0.99, 0.50, 0.75, 0.64 and 0.68 respectively. All the items are above cut off point of 2.50 except item 3. The cluster mean of 3.01 with standard deviation of 0.67 was found to be above the cut-off point of 2.50. This indicates that dialogue to a high extent influence the administration of universities.

Research Question 2: To what extent does confrontation as unions-university conflict resolution strategy influence the administration of universities?

Table 2: Mean scores and standard deviation for influence of confrontation as a unions-university conflict resolution strategy on administration of universities

Item No.	Items Description	N	x	Std	Decision
6	Staff should express their mind on issues bothering them when organizing in the university	381	3.40	0.67	HE
7	Approaching the disputed parties on the organization of the university will not resolve some conflicting issues	381	2.02	0.99	LE
8	The use of force in university will worsen some conflicting issues	381	3.35	0.95	HE
9	The use of force will help to resolve some conflicting issues in the university	381	2.76	0.90	HE
10	Conflict will be resolved when one of the parties involved confronts the other	381	2.51	1.02	HE
Cluster Mean/Std			2.81	0.91	HE

Table 2 showed the mean ratings of items 6-10. Mean ratings are 3.40, 2.02, 3.35, 2.76, and 2.51 respectively with the corresponding standard deviation of 0.67, 0.99, 0.95, 0.90 and 1.02 respectively. All the items are above the cut-off point of 2.50, except item 7. The cluster mean of 2.81 with standard deviation of 0.91 was found to be above the cut-off

point of 2.50. This indicates that confrontation to a high extent influence administration of universities.

Ho1: Dialogue as a unions-university conflict resolution strategy has no significant influence on administration of universities in Benue State.

Table 3: Chi-Square for significant influence of dialogue as a unions-university conflict resolution strategy on administration of universities in Benue State

Response	Observed N	Expected N	df	Level of Sign	χ^2_{cal}	P-value	Decision
VHE	173	95.3					
HE	192	95.3					
LE	9	95.3	3	0.05	327.21 ^a	0.00	Ho Rejected
VLE	7	95.3					
Total	381						

Table 3 reveals that chi-square=327.21 at df=3; P=.00<0.05. Since probability value of 0.00 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis which states that dialogue as a unions-university conflict resolution strategy has no significant influence on administration of universities in Benue State is therefore rejected. This indicates that dialogue as a unions-university conflict resolution strategy has significant influence on administration of universities in Benue State.

Ho2: Confrontation as a unions–university conflict resolution strategy has no significant influence on administration of universities in Benue State.

Table 4: Chi-Square for significant influence of confrontation as a unions’-university conflict resolution strategy on administration of universities in Benue State

Response	Observed N	Expected N	df	Level of Sign	χ^2_{cal}	P-value	Decision
VHE	132	95.3					
HE	225	95.3	3	0.05	346.80	0.03	Ho Rejected
LE	8	95.3					
VLE	16	95.3					
Total	381						

Table 4 reveals that $\chi^2=346.80$, $df=3$; $P=.03 < 0.05$. Since probability value of 0.03 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis which states that confrontation as a unions-university conflict resolution strategy has no significant influence on administration of universities in Benue State is therefore rejected. This indicates that confrontation as a unions-university conflict resolution strategy has significant influence on administration of universities in Benue State.

Discussion of the findings

The first finding indicated that dialogue has significant influence on administration of universities. This study found that through positive discussion among the university staff, decision making could be made easy. This is because if staff engage in peaceful talk, decision making in the university could be made easy. More so, round table discussion with ASUU, NASU and students could resolve conflict. This finding is in line with Olaleye and Arogundade (2013) who reported that one of the most effective strategies for resolving conflict is dialogue between the two parties involved by finding out the root cause of the conflict and removing it. The finding also lends credence to Olulade (2005) who asserted that a thorough diagnosis of conflict usually leads to the best possible solution for all the parties involved in the conflict.

The second finding showed that confrontation has significant influence on administration of universities. This means that respondents had accepted that staff should express their views on issues in university and disagreed that the use of force in the university will worsen some conflicting issues but also accepted that sometimes use of force will help to resolve some conflicting issues in the university and that approaching the disputed parties in university could resolve some conflicting issues. This is because when the conflicting parties face each other, they express their views on issues and such issues are resolved. This result is in agreement with Omemiu and Oladunjoye (2013) who reported that confrontation is one of the conflict resolution strategies used in resolving conflict in the universities. The authors further reported that the use of confrontation as a strategy is favourable in resolving conflicts in universities. The implication is that confrontation is one of the effective strategies used in managing conflict in the universities.

Conclusion

Conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in any interactive situation involving human beings and it is ubiquitous at all levels of human social systems. Conflict is bound to exist hence there are conflicting objectives, methods, philosophies, or missions and the desire of managers to protect jurisdictions, control resources or acquire power. There is need to resolve the conflict amicably to allow genuine progress in an organisation. Based on the findings of this study it was concluded that dialogue and confrontation have significant influence on administration of universities in the Benue State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Authorities of universities should dialogue with unions in order to resolve conflicts in their universities for effective administration. This will be through bringing the actors of conflict to a round table for discussion which will result in shifting of ground.
2. Conflicting parties should use the democratic norms of confrontation, due process, fairness and express their mind during confrontation. This could be through the coming together of both the university managements and unions to chart a way forward.

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