

INVOLVEMENT IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION ISSUES AND JOB PERFORMANCE OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN UNIVERSITIES IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated academic staff involvement in decision making with specific reference to conflict resolutions in universities. The study sought to determine whether academic staff participation in conflict resolution issues significantly predicted their job performance. The area of the study was universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. A questionnaire was used to collect data from 434 respondents from selected universities in Cross River State. One hypothesis was stated and tested using One-way analysis of variance at 0.05 level of significance. The result showed that the higher the level of involvement in conflict resolution issues, the better the job performance of academic staff in universities in Cross River State. Upon further analysis with a Post Hoc Test, the source of the difference was basically from all the various categories of involvement in conflict resolution issues, but was more from those who exhibited high level of involvement in conflict resolution issues. Based on the finding, it was recommended that academic staff involvement in conflict resolution should be depended upon as a significant determinant of their effective job performance.

Key words: Involvement, staff conflict, conflict resolution, job performance



Introduction

The contemporary world is increasingly multicultural and the identity crisis resulting from this sometimes threatens sustainable human and material development by organizations and societies (Arikpo, 2014). This crisis which often erupts, makes promotion of understanding and dialogue to

be prime issue in the management of multiculturalism, global peace and security (Oloyede, 1999). The issue of managing conflict is often encountered in work organizations because employees were recruited from different socio-cultural backgrounds. The diverse background of employees is particularly noticeable in

institutions of higher learning due to the how tasks are assigned to employees. For instance, there exist employee structures, such as; the governance, management, bureaucratic and collegial categories. The governance structure draws membership from within and outside the university. The members work on a part-time basis and are in charge of the policy making since they represent the employer.

The management category has the Vice Chancellor as the Chief Executive officer of the Institution. He/she is responsible for the day to day administration of the institution. The Collegial categories of staff are made up mainly of teaching/research employees recruited into academic departments based on their areas of specialties. There is yet another category called the non-teaching staff. All these categories, except the management, usually form trade unions, whose elected executives bargain with the employer for better working conditions.

Once granted approval by the federal government of Nigeria to commence operations, such an institution is expected to admit students into their desired courses of study available in the institution. The conditions of admission, studies and graduation are usually clearly stated in the relevant admission documents and students' handbook. As long as students who were admitted are graduated on schedule, the affected Institution is assumed to have attained its organizational goal.

Meanwhile, diverse demographic characteristics of employees and their existing jobs assignment objectives tend to create conflict. These conflicts affect the job performance of the employees and the goal attainment of their Institutions. In a similar view earlier Hotton in Arikpo (2014) remarked that, conflict in Nigeria's higher education system is incapable due to the diverse nature of members of this organization. In a related contribution, Arikpo (2014) opined that employee job performance is confronted with challenges associated with non-involvement in decision making and this situation often resulted in poor job performance. Similarly, Boyede, Olonade and Omotoye (2021) reported

that, the working man is not consulted on matters affecting his/her work, as a result, the work environment permits little autonomy by not injecting democracy into it, hence the worker feels alienated, frustrated and demoralized in the production process.

However, in a contrary view, Nwadike (2019) pointed out that, the extent to which employee involvement in decision making affect organizational level performance gain remains unclear. In view of the controversies concerning job performance as a dependent variable by several researchers and practitioners, this study saw a need to examine the involvement of employees in decision making on their conflict resolution issues and their job performance in the institutions of higher learning in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The theories adopted to guide the study are those on Workers' Participation in Decision Making by MacGregor (1960) and Expectancy Theory by Vroom (1964).

The theory of worker's participation by MacGregor (1960)

The theory of workers participation according to MacGregor (1960) stated that, worker's participation in decision making consist basically in creating opportunity under suitable condition for people to influence decisions which affect them. The relevance of this theory to the present study is that, it provides explanation on how involvement in decision making relates with employee job performance and as well as the organizational goal attainment.

The Expectancy Theory by Victor Vroom (1964)

The theory posits that an employee would be motivated to endeavour to reach a goal if he/she has a belief in the value of the goal if attained (Vroom, 1964). In other words, an employee could be motivated to become productive towards the attainment of a goal if he/she believes that the attainment would lead to desired outcomes. Vroom's Expectancy theory is relevant to this present paper of study because it provides explanations on the concept and issues about job performance of

employees.

Statement of the Problem

In order to increase the workers' commitment and humanize the workplace with the intention of improving their job performance, management needs to permit a high degree of employee involvement. In view of the expected benefits from increased involvement of workers in decision making, many studies have been carried out associating participatory decision making with the job performance of academic staff in universities. Based on available literature, these studies focused essentially on management leadership style and employees' job performance.

However, these studies appear to overlook the aspect of academic staff direct motivation while performing their duties as a dependable factor in the goal attainment of the affected institutions. Such factors include; staff development, staff promotion and staff conflict resolution issues. This apparent neglect has led to constant strike actions which often lead to closure of higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. The attendant situation has affected labour and management as well as their organizational goal attainment. It is in an attempt to bridge the gap on participatory management and job performance of employees that this study determined the extent to which involvement in conflict resolution issues affect their job performance in selected Institutions of higher learning in the Cross River State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The study investigated the influence of involvement in conflict resolution issues on job performance of academic staff in universities in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Research Question

1. How does involvement in conflict resolution issues influence job performance of academic staff in universities in Cross River State?

Research Hypothesis

1. Involvement in conflict resolution issues does not have significant influence on

job performance of academic staff in universities in Cross River State.

This study is expected to contribute significantly to the improvement of knowledge on how academic staff involvement in decision making affect their job performance especially in the Institutions of Higher Learning in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Industrial conflict according to Nwagbara (2007) occurs when different parts of the organization are not interacting effectively. Conflict in the view of Igbinoba, Salau, Falola, Olokundun and Opeyemi (2019) is a phenomenon which seems to take place all of a sudden and tends to undermine the health of an organization, requiring urgent attention by the manager or responsible organizational personnel. Nwagbara (2007:62) described two forms of conflict in an industry. These include; conflict of interest and conflict of rights... Conflict of interests relates to issues of collective bargaining agreement and other conditions of work; while conflict of rights is concerned with those issues which involve alleged violations of rights already existing in the collective agreement or conflict of employment. Other forms of overt expression of conflicts according to Nwagbara (2007:63) included; strike, lockout, work low down, overtime ban, work-to-rule, obstruction of new policies, refusal to participate in joint committee and pursuit of exaggerated complains etc.

In their study on employee involvement in decision making and workers' performance in selected organizations in Ashanti Region of Ghana, Akuoko, Dwumah and Ansong (2012) found out among others that, when the atmosphere was harmonious, it prompted good feeling within employees and enhanced cordial relationship between management and the employees. This meant that, when employees were involved in decision-making, it affects their job performance positively. To empirically find out the relationship between employees' involvement in decision-making and their job performance, the bivariate analysis was used by Akuoko *et al.*, (2012). Since the computed chi-square value of 55.71

was greater than the critical value of 3.841, the null hypothesis was rejected. It was concluded that, "there was a significant association between employees' involvement in decision-making concerning the nature of workers' relationship and extent of their job performance."

A deeper understanding of participation of employees in decision-making on conflict resolution and their job performance could be illustrated by some empirical studies carried out on the issue. For instance, Ayodele and Adewumi (2007) studied the incidence and management of conflicts in secular and non-secular tertiary institutions in South-West Nigeria and concluded that, the more workers participate in decision-making on conflict resolution, the better their labour-management relations and commitment to their duty.

Similarly, Adeniji and Adekunjo (2010) found out that dialogue rather than strike was a better method of putting the university and other work organizations at their best. Their study used a descriptive survey research and its research questions were posed as follows - (i) What roles do the unions play in the educational development of Nigeria? (ii) How effective do use of strikes resolve problems in Nigerian universities? (iii) What role does the government play in the development of education in Nigeria? and; (iv) What strategies should the workers adopt to put the universities at their best? The findings of the study among others show that 60% of the respondents indicated that strikes can be used to resolve labour crisis in the university. Also, 60% of the respondents see workers using dialogue as a method of putting the university at its best, while 40% viewed collective bargaining as a strategy that will accomplish this objective.

Okoli, Okeke and Nuel-Okoli (2017) in their contribution examined conflict management and employee commitment among academic staff of public universities in Nigeria. One of the study's enquiries was to verify the relationship between management's adoption of an integrated style of conflict resolution and how it correlates with academic staff being committed to their job. The finding revealed that the strategy of giving room for an

academic staff to partake in the resolution of conflict was a significant correlate of the staff being committed to his/her job. In a related study, Osakede, Ijimakinwa, Adesanya and Ojo (2018) probed conflict management in state universities in Nigeria by employing a survey research design. Inclusive in their investigations was an enquiry of the extent to which conflict management pattern of involving academic staff, enhanced their active job participation. The findings among others indicated that the conflict management pattern of incorporating academic staff in resolving conflict did have a significant association with the extent to which they participated actively on their job.

In a similar study, Yusuf and Ibrahim (2019) determined the relationship between conflict management strategies and administrative effectiveness in Nigerian universities. The study's enquiries involved determining the extent of relationship between patterns which involve academic staff in conflict resolution and how they relate with their job performance. The finding revealed that the patterns which involved academic staff in conflict resolution did relate significantly with the job performance of the academic staff. Dada (2020) carried out a related study by investigating the interplay between conflict management and academic staff performance in a Nigerian state university. The study's posers included ascertaining the extent to which the school management's style of involving staff in conflict resolution related with academic staff performance. The result revealed among others that a strong positive relationship existed between the school management's style of conflict resolution and academic staff performance.

In their study on conflict management and academic employees' job performance in Nigerian polytechnics, Ahmed and Popoola (2021) explored the relationship between conflict management pattern and academic employees' job performance. The result showed that the conflict management pattern of not involving academic employees in conflict resolution did have a significant, but negative relationship with academic employees' job

performance. In a survey of the impact of school administrators' conflict management strategies on job performance of academic staff in state tertiary institutions in Nigeria, Takwate (2022) utilized a descriptive survey method. The study's objectives included examining the extent to which conflict management strategies that involved academic staff in resolving conflicts impacted on their job performance. The finding indicated that the conflict management strategies which involved academic staff in resolution of conflicts did have a significant relationship with their job performance.

Methodology

The study adopted ex-post facto research design. Ex-post facto research design is a non-experimental design in which the phenomena of interest had already occurred before the time of the study and cannot be manipulated in any way. The population of the study consisted all the 4,337 academic staff in the two public universities in Cross River State during the 2021/2022 academic year (3,228 staff from University of Calabar and 1,109 staff in University of Cross River State), out of which a sample of 434 academic staff was randomly selected from the two universities representing 10% of the population for the study.

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled Involvement in Conflict Resolution Issues and Job Performance Questionnaire (ICRIJPQ). The ICRIJPQ was divided into three sections; A, B and C. Section A of the ICRIJPQ measured demographic data of the subjects such as sex, educational qualification and rank, while Section B consist of six items measuring involvement in conflict resolution issues and Section C consists of ten items measuring staff job performance. Sections B and C of the ICRIJPQ were measured on 4-point scale with responses ranging as follows: Strongly Agreed (SA), Agree (A); Disagree and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The face validity of the instrument was determined by two measurement and evaluation experts in the Department of Educational Foundations and one expert in

Department of Continuing Education and Development Studies who ascertained the degree to which the items on the instrument measures what it is expected to measure. After all the inputs were made by the experts, a final copy of the instrument was produced and used for data collection in the study. To determine the reliability of the research instrument, a trial testing was done using 30 academic staff in the two universities who were not part of the sample and data collected from them were analysed using the Cronbach Alpha reliability method which gave a reliability coefficient of .83 for involvement in conflict resolution issues and .78 for staff job performance.

The data collection for the study was done by the researchers which lasted for about six weeks. In each of the two universities, the researchers randomly selected the required number of subjects needed across all the various departments in the university and three students taught by each of the participating staff were selected to answer for the staff job performance. The responses by the three students that assessed each of their lecturers were attached to the responses from the lecturer and the average score by the three students was recorded for each of the lecturer. The data collected were analysed using One-way Analysis of Variance tested at .05 level of significance.

Presentation of Results

Hypothesis One

Involvement in conflict resolution issues does not have significant influence on job performance of academic staff in universities in Cross River State. The independent variable here is involvement in conflict resolution issues which was categorized into three; low, moderate and high, while the dependent variable is job performance of academic staff. Respondents who scored from 6-11 in the six items that measured involvement in conflict resolution issues were classified as low while those that scored from 12-18 were classified as moderate and those that scored from 19-24 were classified as high. The hypothesis was analysed using One-way Analysis of Variance tested at .05 level of significance as presented

in Table 1.

Table 1: One-way Analysis of Variance for influence of involvement in conflict resolution issues on job performance of academic staff in universities in Cross River State (N=434)

Level of involvement in conflict resolution issues	N	\bar{X}	SD
Low	125	20.65	5.55
Moderate	233	22.84	5.30
High	76	26.05	5.43
Total	434	22.77	5.67

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-ratio	p-level
Between Groups	1382.991	2	691.496	23.772*	.000
Within Groups	12537.426	431	29.089		
Total	13920.417	433			

*Significant at .05 alpha level; $p < .05$.

The result in Table 1 revealed that the mean score of 20.65 with a standard deviation of 5.55 obtained by the 125 subjects who are lowly involved in conflict resolution issues is less than the mean score of 22.84 with a standard deviation of 5.30 obtained by the 233 subjects who are moderately involved in conflict resolution issues, and this is also less than the mean score of 26.05 with a standard deviation of 5.43 obtained by the 76 subjects who are highly involved in conflict resolution issues. This shows that the higher the level of involvement in conflict resolution issues, the better the job performance of academic staff in universities in Cross River State.

The result further revealed that the calculated F-ratio of 23.772 obtained with a p-

value of .000 at .05 level of significance with 2 and 431 degrees of freedom is statistically significant since the p-value is less than .05. This implies that the hypothesis which states that involvement in conflict resolution issues does not have significant influence on job performance of academic staff in universities in Cross River State was rejected. Since job performance of academic staff in universities in Cross River State was significantly influenced by involvement in conflict resolution issues, the Fisher Least Significant Difference (LSD) Post Hoc Test multiple comparisons was carried out to check for the source of the difference and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Fisher LSD Post Hoc Test for influence of involvement in conflict resolution issues on job performance of academic staff in universities in Cross River State (N=434)

(I) level of involvement in conflict resolution issues	(J) level of involvement in conflict resolution issues	Mean Difference (I-J)	p-level
Low	Moderate	-2.19*	.000
	High	-5.41*	.000
Moderate	Low	2.19*	.000
	High	-3.21*	.000
High	Low	5.41*	.000
	Moderate	3.21*	.000

*Significant at .05 level; $p < .05$.

The results of the Fisher LSD Post Hoc Test analysis presented in Table 2 revealed that

academic staff who are lowly involved in conflict resolution issues had a significant lower mean score in their job performance when compared with those who are moderately involved in conflict resolution issues (MD=-2.19; $p<.05$), as well as when compared with those who are highly involved in conflict resolution issues (MD=-5.41; $p<.05$). The result finally revealed that academic staff who are moderately involved in conflict resolution issues had a significant lower mean score in their job performance when compared with those who are highly involved in conflict resolution issues (MD=-3.21; $p<.05$). Based on these, the source of the difference was basically from all the various categories of involvement in conflict resolution issues, but was more from those who exhibited high level of involvement in conflict resolution issues.

Discussion of Findings

The result revealed that the higher the level of involvement in conflict resolution issues, the better the job performance of academic staff in universities in Cross River State. This implying that there is need to involve the academic staff in conflict resolution issues in order to enhance their job performance levels. The result also can be inferred to mean that in the event of their non-involvement in conflict resolution issues, the probability of their job performance levels being optimized would be diminished.

The finding is in line with that of Osakede *et al.*, (2018) whose finding revealed that conflict management pattern of incorporating academic staff in conflict resolution engendered their active participation on their job. The finding also corroborated with that of Dada (2020) who reported that school management's style of involving academic staff in conflict resolution did serve as a significant correlate of their job performance. The finding also was in consonance with that of Ahmed and Popoola (2021) who observed that the conflict management pattern of academic staffs' non-involvement in conflict resolution served to deter their job performance levels. Lastly, Takwate (2022) reported that conflict

management strategies which involved academic staff in resolution of conflicts was a significant correlate with their job performance.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study highlights the significance of academic staff involvement in conflict resolution issues in universities. Therefore, it is recommended that school management should operate in such a way that academic staffs are in decision-making concerning their conflict resolution issues, as such an approach has been reported to improve employees' job performance by several studies, including the present one. Secondly, it is also recommended that further studies be carried out using more universities within the six geo-political zones of the country for the purpose of comparing labour-management relationships in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria.

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