

## **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA; A CATALYST FOR PEACE**

**BY**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper discusses conflict management in university education in Nigeria. Conflict refers to a clash of interest between two persons or a group of people. A majority of Nigerian universities are characterized by conflict issues. These conflict issues have given rise to hostility within the university environment thus there is a decline in the development and progress of the universities in Nigeria. The aim of this paper is to provide various ways through which conflict can be effectively managed so as to promote national peace. The objective of this paper is to resolve conflict issues in the universities. The paper also discussed the various ways of effectively managing conflict in university education in Nigeria which include the inculcation of peace education in the university curriculum, proper management of university resources, provision of adequate facilities, amongst others. The causes of conflict in the university were discussed to include lack of facilities, unfair university policies, extortion of money from students by lecturers, security personnel, sexual harassment, absence of peace education in the curriculum amongst others and it was concluded that conflict is a part of human existence and that if not properly managed, would amount to a decline in the development and progress of the university. The paper proffered ways forward from the effects of conflict in the university to include the adoption of good leadership skills by university administrators, punishment of offenders of sexual harassment, provision of adequate facilities for the university, sacking of greedy administrators upon thorough investigation amongst others.*

**Keywords: Conflict, Conflict management, University education, Peace**

### **Introduction**

Conflict can be seen as disagreement between two or more parties with the intention to gain interest and disfavour the opponent. Conflict is a clash of interest. The basics of conflict may vary but it is always a part of society. Basis of conflict may be personal, racial, class, caste, political and international conflict in groups often follows a specific course (Wikipedia, 2020). In order for a university to progress, it must have a peaceful and harmonious environment where quality learning can take place without interruptions. In Nigeria, the universities are characterized by issues of conflict ranging from clashes between fellow students, students and lecturers, students and university administrators amongst others. Conflicts in Nigerian universities are like growing monsters (Adeyemi and Ademola, 2012). Conflict has remained an instrument employed by students or groups in the pursuit of their personal or collective goals and the forums put in place by the management are much more far-reaching than ever before. Conflicts are inevitable in the university system thus it is important for it to be effectively managed so that it would not disrupt the university learning environment. The aim of this paper is to provide various ways through which conflict can be effectively managed so as to promote national peace. The objective of this paper is to resolve conflict issues in the universities. Ndam

and Stella (2013) observed that the causes of conflicts in one university might differ from another. The paper examines various possible causes of conflict in universities in Nigeria and proffers ways on how to effectively manage them.

### **Conflict**

The term conflict has its origin from its Latin word ‘**confligere**’ meaning to strike together (Chigbo, Aloba and Igbogi, 2013). Charles (2013) opined that conflict can be constructive or destructive. Conflict is constructive when it resolves in clarification of important problems and issues as well promote better understanding of differences while destructive conflict decreases competence, leads to irresponsible behaviour such as fighting, poor working relationship, lowers moral and decreases productivity. Ezeuzo (2011) mentioned that conflict is a struggle over values and claims of scarce resources, status and power in which the aims of the opponent is to neutralize injure or eliminate their rivals for the purpose of gaining personal interest. Ositoye, Adeboye, Alade and Omalade (2012) asserted that conflict can be disagreement that exists between one or two parties. Many people view conflict as an activity that is almost totally negative and has no redeeming qualities. Some consider it as dysfunctional, destructive, and the same time as a catalyst for change, creativity and production (Posigha and Oghuvwu, 2009). Akorode (2005) maintained that conflicts are natural part of life when disagreement among people in a social milieu remain unsolved, they graduate into conflicts. Conflict will always occur but a well-managed conflict will not degenerate to violence. Since violence will not erupt without conflict as antecedents, one can assume that many of the conflicts in tertiary institutions and insecurity degenerated is because their antecedents (causes) were not properly managed or that the conflicting parties did not explore the power of communication and conflict manager’s personality in resolving the crises (Agbonna; Yusuf and Onifade, 2009). Fatile and Adejuwon (2011) agreed that no meaningful development can take place in a crisis-ridden system torn apart by crisis as witnessed in the educational institutions in the country today.

Baldwin, Bommer and Rubin (2008) provided the positive and negative effects of conflict to include:

#### **Positive effects of conflict**

- Brings problems into the open that might otherwise be ignored
- Can motivate people to try to understand others’ positions and ideas
- Encourages people to voice new ideas, facilitating innovation and change
- Forces people to challenge their thinking and assumptions often improving the quality of decisions.

#### **Negative effects of conflict**

- Can lead to negative emotions and stress
- Often resource communication between participants, which can hurt work coordination
- May cause leaders (school managers) to avoid participative leadership and instead rely on authoritarian decisions which may bring about conflict.
- Can result to work group divisions since members of the opposing group tend to emphasize the difference between themselves and the opposition.

### **Conflict Management**

Conflict management is the process of igniting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of conflict. The aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in an organizational setting properly managed conflict can improve group outcomes. Adeniji (2009) and Albert (2010) agreed that conflict management entails the establishment of various mechanisms to eliminate the misconception or negative feeling aspects of conflict to enhance learning and group outcomes so as to pave the way for people to achieve their goals. Adaeze (2014) submitted that it is a diagnostic process or dialogue where strategies and intervention are designed to curtail the conflict. This implies that when conflict arises, the need is to become a positive solution provider, rather than generating a negative one, which threatens the individual or group, so as to cover conflict limitation, containment and litigation. Oni (2007) asserted that conflict management enhances capacity through a number of measures by working with the parties involved in conflict.

### **Education**

Duru (2011) maintained that education comprises of all the series of instruction and discipline which are intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper, and form the manners and habits of youths, and fit them for usefulness in their future stations. Ofogbor and Emekedou (2017) quoted UNESCO's definition of education as the total process of developing human ability and behaviours. They rightly said that education is an organized and sustained instruction designed to communicate a combination of knowledge, skill and understanding, values for all activities of life. Asaju and Sunday (2014) posited that education is a process of teaching and training in schools for the development of knowledge and skills, preparing the individual for functional living in the society. Akpo (2015) submitted that education is the process of facilitating knowledge through the transfer of skills, values, beliefs and habits under the guidance of educators through the learners may also educate themselves in a process called autodidactic training. Boyi (2014) mentioned that education is a systematic procedure for the transfer and transformation of culture through formal and informal training of people in a society. It deals with mental, physical, psychological and social development of citizens in a given society. Okojie (2013) maintained that education is a process for manpower development which is necessary for the achievement of rapid growth and development in any country. Asaju and Sunday (2014) submitted that education is a process of teaching and training in schools for the development of knowledge and skills, preparing the individual for functional living in the society.

### **University Education**

University education is education obtained after the secondary school level. The objective of this paper is to proffer various ways of achieving quality assurance through management in universities. The purpose of the university is to train future leaders who will be politicians, educationist, lawyers, engineers, doctors and scientist etc. The purpose of university education is for teaching, learning, research, community and skill development. The lofty goals of university education are to be achieved through teaching, research, dissemination of existing and new information, services to community, skill development and a storehouse of knowledge.

### **Benefit of University Education**

- Individuals are required to have degrees for a wide range of careers such as medicine, education, engineering, accounting and law and the university provides for the obtainment of such degrees.
- University education will help an individual to succeed in today's workforce and establish an enjoyable career of his/her choice
- The job market is extremely competitive and employers require the services of skilled employees to work for them. This skill can be developed in the university.

### **Peace**

Peace can be referred to as a situation whereby there is an absence of disorder and violence. Peace cannot take place in a vacuum; the students should be made to change their thinking perspective and value of other people for peace to reign in the society. Where there is no peace, in the university environment, the environment will consist of chaos, disorder and violence, and quality teaching and learning cannot take place. Therefore, there is need to look up to peace education as the foundation to resort or resolved the crises rocking in the university system so that, peace can reign in the country where students can have a peaceful learning environment.

### **How to Achieve Conflict Management in Nigerian Universities**

Efficient and effective management of conflicts is fundamental to the development of any society, but the prevailing situations in Nigerian universities constitute a reversal of this reality. Conflict in universities in Nigeria is inescapable. It exists at every level of the university, from the administrative level to the student level. While conflict can be negative and can cause deep rifts in the framework of the institution, it can also be used as a tool to take the institution and the people in it from stagnation to a new level of effectiveness. Olaleye and Arogundade (2013) posited that whenever a conflict occurs, it must be managed and handled constructively; else it will threaten the very existence of the organization, and the nation and society at large. The following are ways through which conflict can be effectively managed:

- 1. Peace Education in the Curriculum:** Peace education is the development of skills and acquisition of knowledge to be able to live in harmony with oneself, others and the society at large. Peace education can encourage the cultivation of peaceful attitudes in its receivers and create conducive climates in tertiary institutions that will promote its effective and efficient management for optimal performance (Alimba, 2013). This would aid in the effective management of conflict in the university.
- 2. Adequate facilities:** Adequate facilities is distribution of facilities in sufficient capacity to meet the existing needs of students. Adequate educational facilities include libraries, well equipped classrooms laboratories, athletic facilities which may include a field and sports equipment. The provision of adequate facilities would help to effectively manage conflict in the university.
- 3. Adequate Provision/Management of Resources:** Where there is an adequate provision/ proper management of university resources, facilities can be provided for and maintained. Money is a very important resource needed in the educational system and requires adequate provision because through it, all other vital elements in the school can be obtained (Nzepueme, 2011). The provision and proper management of university resources would help in achieving efficient conflict management in the university.

4. **Good Leadership:** This is also another way of achieving an effective conflict management. University administrators need to have good leadership skills which entail good listening skills, good motivation skills, good planning skills and much more. This would go a long way in effectively managing conflict in the university.
5. **Effective Communication:** University administrators should be open to hear whatever complaints the students, staff may have. Thus, complaints about conflict issues in the university would be brought up at its early stage and tackled easily. A forum such as Students and Staff forum should be created so that these complaints can be communicated effectively.
6. **Co-operation Amongst University Members:** Members of the university should co-operate with one another too effectively manage conflict in the university. The university should also collaborate with the community where it is situated to effectively manage conflict.

### Causes of Conflict in Nigerian Universities

1. **Inadequate facilities:** This refers to a situation whereby the facilities meant for learning, hostel living and general activities of the federal universities are not provided or are not enough to accommodate members of the university. The only items or equipment that are available are the ones provided when the departments were first established with most of them already becoming obsolete or grounded (Ojimba,2012). This causes conflict amongst the students as they would become frustrated when they do not have enough facilities like libraries, e-learning facilities, laboratories or workshop spaces like their peers in other universities.
2. **Unfair University Policies/Decisions:** This refers to a situation whereby the university policies are unfavourable to members of the university. Policies such as reduction of salaries, curfew at 8pm, withholding exeat cards during holidays amongst others would no doubt cause conflict within the university.
3. **Poor Working Conditions:** Most lecturers in universities in Nigeria face poor working conditions. Their salaries are withheld for months, their offices lack proper ventilation, and they are sometimes subject to harsh treatment by their superiors. This is no doubt one of the major causes of conflict in the university.
4. **Sexual Harassment:** This refers to the harassment of female students and female lecturers by their male counterparts in the university and vice versa. In most universities in Nigeria, students are often pressured for sexual favours by their lecturers. These lecturers pressurize, guilt trip, blackmail or coerce students to have sex with them. This act creates conflict between the two groups.
5. **Increase in School Fees:** This one of the major causes of conflict within the university. An increase in the school fees would cause conflict as the students may not be able to keep up with the expenses and would thus resort to riots to display their frustration on the decision.
6. **Bribery and Corruption:** Plessis (2014) argued that corruption while being tied particularly to the act of bribery, is a general term covering the misuse of authority as a result of considerations of personal gain, which need not to be monetary. Bribery and corruption are not uncommon phenomenon in universities in Nigeria. Students are extorted by lecturers to provide them with large sums of money. If the students fail to do so, they might face the consequences which normally includes failure in that lecturer's course.

7. **Mismanagement:** Mismanagement refers to the dishonest and incompetent management of the financial resources which are given to a person to carry out a particular activity. Ololube (2016) submitted that grant monies provided by the NUC and NBTE which are meant for capital projects are either stolen (wholly or partially) or diverted to other projects. Tihamiyu (2012) noted that there is a lot of mismanagement of funds by educational boards and the moneys meant for higher education are mismanaged and as such Nigerian higher education institutions have joined other public sector institutions in having a sizeable number of uncompleted or abandoned projects
8. **Absence of Peace Education:** In most Nigerian universities, there is an absence of peace education which is needed to instil moral values and the culture of peace within the students.

### Conclusion

Conflicts are an inevitable part of university education in Nigeria. This means that they cannot be eradicated completely. It is necessary to effectively manage conflict so as to avoid the disruption of university activities and a decline in the progress and development of the university. This can be done through effective communication between conflicting parties, effective resource management, amongst others. The paper discussed the causes of conflicts to include sexual harassment, bribery and corruption, inadequate facilities, amongst others.

### Suggestions

The following ways can be adopted for effective conflict management in university education in Nigeria:

1. The university should aim to resolve conflicts through communication and not always by coercive means.
2. There should be a forum where students can express their grievances to the school administrators.
3. The university administrators should adopt good leadership skills so as to solve problems within the university.
4. There should be a provision of adequate facilities in the university.
5. Peace education should be inculcated into the university curriculum
6. Cases of sexual harassment should be treated with utmost seriousness and the offenders when found guilty, should be handed over to the police.
7. Greedy university administrators should be sacked upon thorough investigation.
8. There should be co-operation between members of the university so as to effectively manage conflict in the university.
9. University resources should be effectively managed so as to provide for inadequate facilities. This would minimise the occurrence of conflict in the university.

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