Conflicts As Constraints to Effective Management of Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria: The Way Forward

Ada, Adoga James

Department of Educational Foundations and Management,
College Of Education, Oju,
Benue State,Nigeria

Abstract

This study examines the concepts of conflict and constraints and their antecedents in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It makes a clarification of causes, and types and conflict management in higher institutions of learning. The paper observes that management staff, students, teachers, government. Trade Unions may be sources of conflict for one reason or the other. Nevertheless, the outcomes of such conflicts causes prolong of academic activities, destruction of life and properties and in some cases render school environment completely insecure for serious academic activities not beneficial to students, institutions and the society at large. It recommends that the way forward should be proper handling of higher institutions by management and government to be more democratic in handling conflicts by creating avenues for discussing and designing. The paper concludes that conflict is an attendant feature of human interaction in every organization which cannot be eliminated, therefore, maintaining a cordial relationship between staff, students by school authority, is necessary, also involving students and trade unions in decision making process appeared to be the most effective way forward for effective management of tertiary institutions.

1. Introduction

The contemporary world is increasingly multicultural and the identify conflicts resulting from this sometimes threatens sustainable human development. This makes the promotion of understanding and dialogue to be a prime issue in the management of multiculturalism, global peace and security. (Oloyede, 1999). Conflict is an inevitable friction in any organization. Efficient and effective management of conflicts is fundamental to the development of any society particularly tertiary institution of learning. Conflict in tertiary institution is inescapable. Conflict exits at every level of our academic world. And while conflict can be negative and can cause deep rifts in the frame work 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. What makes the difference is conflict management (Hotton, 1998).

Organizational behaviour is positively related to organizational output. For this reason, the educational administrator needs to take conflict management issues as a very important issues because conflicts and attempts towards resolution are perhaps the most powerful force existing for bringing about changes in pattern of organizational behaviour (Hanson, 1991). Indeed one of the commonly expressed concerns of organizational people in developing countries is that permanence of internal conflicts in their organization. Conflicts will always occur but a well managed conflict will not degenerate to violence. Since violence will not erupt without conflict as a antecedents, one can assume that many of the conflicts in tertiary institutions and insecurity degenerated is because their antecedents/cause were not properly managed or that the conflicting parties did not explore the power of communication and conflict manger's personality in resolving the crises (Agbona, Yusuf & Onifade, 2009).

The important of tertiary education to the national development cannot be overemphasized. However,

no meaningful development can take place in a crisis-ridden system torn apart by crisis as witnessed in educational institution in Nigeria today. Today, students, staff (Academics & non-academics) poses conflict as militancy in the nation's tertiary institutions inform of violence revolts, protests, unrests as well as incessant closure of schools for months in the wake of unrest. This have become regular characteristics of Nigerian tertiary institutions (Adeyemi, Ekurdayo & Alonge, 2010) The educational administrator is faced with myriads of problems arising from conflict and so, one should be able to device necessary conflict management mechanisms if the objectives of the school are to be achieved.

2. Conceptual Frame Work

Tertiary institutions are always in crises when conflicts occur, which vary from campus to campus depending on the size, location, student population, mission, specialization, governance and unionization. What can trigger conflict, perhaps even large scale ones, on one campus may be inconceivable on another. Aguba, (2009) referred to conflict as a struggle or contest, when workers and management have in compatible, conflicting or irreconcilable views, on issues, that could lead to conflict. He maintained that it is unthinkable to find any industrial society without industrial conflict, stressing that even Japan which is regarded as the Mecca of industrial harmony has elements of industrial conflict in one form or the other.

Ezegbe in Ndil (1997) defines conflict as "mutual hostility in inter human relations in educational institutions in Nigeria" Mutual hostility can occur in form of results, black Mailing, withdraws of love and support, withdrawal of resources, salaries, wages, fringe benefits, or incentive, sudden transfer, suspension, violent demonstration and so on. Conflict can occur at the level of interpersonal, inter group/organization or intra-organizational relationship involving chief Executive (Vice chancellors, provost or rector) and the rest of the staff, the students the super-ordinate cadre, and the subordinates, the senior and the junior staff, the student and school authority, the community and the school. Many people view conflict as an activity that is almost totally negative and has no redeeming qualities. While other school of thought accepted it as dysfunctional, destructive and the same times as a catalyst for change, creativity and production (Posisha & Ogbuvwa, 2009). Conflict results from human interaction in the context of incompatible ends and where one's inability to satisfy needs or ends depends on choices, decisions and behaviour of others. It is therefore possible to argue that conflict is endemic in nature of human relationships and societies, It is the result of interaction among people, and unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions and an expression of the basic fact of human interdependence (Adejuwon & Okewale, 2009)

Alabi, (2010) sees conflict to be in opposition to another or each other, or disagreement" Kesterner and Ray (2002) see conflict as a two parties (individuals, group, State) are involved and strived for goals which can only be reached by one party, and or want to employ incompatible means to achieve a certain goal. It thus implies struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the groups or individual involved are not only to obtain the desired values but neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals.

When differences come to force, collisions, strives, controversies, discords, friction and disagreements cannot be avoided. These are evidences of conflicts. This phenomenon informed the submission of Akomolafe (2002), that conflict is unavoidable in any organization. Ajayi and Ayodele (2002) believe that conflict is inevitable, while Gilhin (2004) submitted that conflict is a normal part of man's social relations. No human organization is thus immune to conflict.

3. Types and Sources of Conflicts

Institution of learning, both secular and non-secular, are perfectly qualified to be regarded as organizations in all respects. Tertiary institutions have very prominent roles to play in the nation's over all development. Many reasons could be adduced for the increase in the level of occurrence of conflicts in recent times when compared to some years back. (Oku, Emerado and Okeke 2008) identified the following types of conflicts.

- ❖ Role Conflict: A person conforms to two or more contradictory sets of roles at the same time. Conformity to one role would prevent the execution of another.
- ❖ Personality Conflict: A person who holds a principle (e.g. democratic principle) finds himself operating another principle (e.g. autocratic principle).
- ❖ Role-Personality: A person's role expectation is at variance with his need disposition. For example, a principal is expected to use school equipment to improve the lots of the school but if he sell them in order to enrich himself, he will be experiencing role-personality conflict.
- ❖ Cognitive conflict: This centre on difference in perspectives or judgments about issues. Legitimate differences of opinion can be expressed, better ideas can be developed and problems can be solved when this type of conflict occurs. Its constructive in nature.
- ❖ Affective Conflict: This has to do with person's emotion and it is directed against people. It can lead to anger, bitterness, goal displacement and lower quantity decision. It is destructive in nature.
- ❖ Organized conflict: This is a group activity. it has for example the blessing of the entire group to sue for conflict, if a union support a conflict, it is an organized conflict.
- ❖ Unorganized Conflict: This is the type of conflict in which individuals responds to conflict in their individual way or the best way they think would resolve or aggravated the conflict. This type of conflict may not have the blessing of the entire group or union.

(Iyayi, Oshio and Okojie, 2011) agreed with the above that conflicts can broadly be two types at work organized and Unorganized, and maintained that conflicts occur with employer, public or private which may take the form of:

- ❖ Peaceful bargaining and grievance handling
- ❖ By boycotts
- ❖ By political action
- ❖ By restriction of output, of sabotage
- ❖ insubordination and physical attack
- ❖ By absenteeism
- ❖ By personal turn over, ban on overtime
- ❖ Strikes

According to them, industrial situation in which workers experience sufficiently acute deprivation, unrest will be expressed in some form. Sources of conflict according to Iyayi, Oshio, & Okojie, (2011) are numerous some are peculiar to respective tertiary institution and others located outside the school. That is to say sources of industrial conflict are internal, and external both often influencing one another.

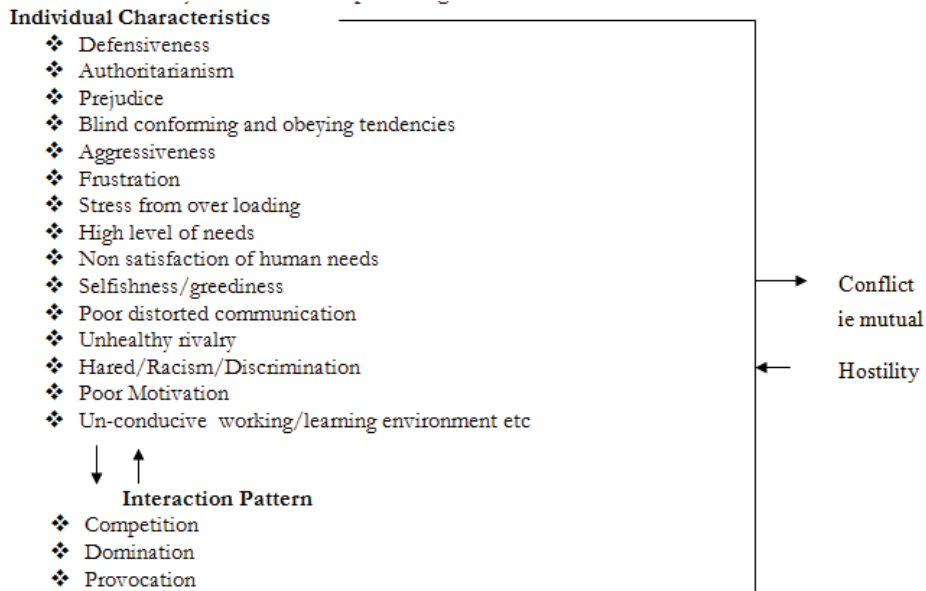## 3.1 Internal sources of conflict would include:

- ❖ Style of management.
- ❖ Nature of physical environment of the work place
- ❖ Orientation of staff
- ❖ Other conditions of service
- ❖ Fairness and efficiency or otherwise of the promotion system, and
- ❖ Effectiveness and fairness of grievance and disputes procedure.

3.2 The External Sources of Conflict Include:

- ❖ Government's industrial, economic and educational policies,
- ❖ Nature of labour legislation
- ❖ Unpatriotic and unethical behaviour of political class
- ❖ National economic mismanagement, and

❖ General distribution of wealth and power in society.

For a comprehensive Perception of conflict, Nye (1973) presented a conceptual framework of the dynamic of conflict promoting factors as shown below:

Individual Characteristics
- ❖ Defensiveness
- ❖ Authoritarianism
- ❖ Prejudice
- ❖ Blind conforming and obeying tendencies
- ❖ Aggressiveness
- ❖ Frustration
- ❖ Stress from over loading
- ❖ High level of needs
- ❖ Non satisfaction of human needs
- ❖ Selfishness/greediness
- ❖ Poor distorted communication
- ❖ Unhealthy rivalry
- ❖ Hared/Racism/Discrimination
- ❖ Poor Motivation
- ❖ Un-conducive working/learning environment etc

Conflict
ie mutual

Hostility

Interaction Pattern
- ❖ Competition
- ❖ Domination
- ❖ Provocation

4. Conceptual Frame Work of Dynamics of Conflict Factors.

Conflict promoting factors affect each other, Individual characteristics are capable of instigating and intensifying interaction pattern, and vice versa (the arrows between these two sets of factors). Conflict is produced from the combination of individual characteristics and interaction patterns. once begins tends to intensify, and add to the very factors that produce it. (Nyc, 1973).

5. Conflict Analysis

One common characteristic of formal of organization is that members deal with conflict everyday. Some times it is between a few individuals. Sometimes it is between groups. Sometimes these conflicts are contained with the operational systems of the organization. With a view to understanding and effectively handling conflict in educational institutions there are two distinct approaches to studying specific situations. These are structural and process models. Thomas in Dunette (1976) stated that process model "focuses upon the sequence of events with the needs to understand and intervene directly into the stream of events of an on going episode" The administrator traces dynamics of the events by recording the impacts of each event on succeeding ones.

The structural model studies conditions, which shape conflict behaviour in a relationship, the parameters that initiate and direct behaviour in conflict situation are fired or at least slow to change. Such parameter include formal organizational roles and informal group membership. This approach is particularly useful in restructuring situation to facilitate desired behaviour patterns. Many organizational conflicts are natural consequences of the system. Take for instance the Union and management relationship and the controversy between school coaches who want games period in the time table and subject teachers who say it should be evening activity. The triggers of these conflicts are built into system. The structural model here

advocates the study and reshaping of the conditions that trigger conflict.

6. Management of Conflicts and the Way Forward

Analysis of conflict in tertiary institutions shows that they affect the attainment of institutional goal positively or adversely. Conflict in some cases could facilitate co-operation, foster goal attainment in any institution if properly handled. On the other hand conflicts among staff, students, institutional and authority and community, if not well managed, could lead to irreparable loss of lives, destruction of properties and disruption of normal academic activities. The survival of any institution therefore, largely depends upon the development of better means of resolving conflicts (Aja, 2012).

Management is process by which human and non-human resources are co-ordinated to accomplish a given set of objectives. (Nwachukwu, 1998). Conflict management according to Albert (2010) refers to the coordinated and timely application of political, economic, military and or security measures taken in response to a situation threatening peace, with the aim of defusing the tensed situation, Preventing escalation or achieving a peaceful settlement of a dispute. Aja in Handy (1978) indicates that the major way forward in management of conflicts include dialogue, Arbitration, Boxing the problem, confrontation and neglect/silence.

1. By Dialogue: The people in conflict are brought together to expose and discuss the issues and problems involved in the conflict aimed at gaining a clearer view of factors causing and promoting the conflict. It gives those in conflict the opportunity to express their feelings, their grievances and views on the matter. A healthy dialogue frees the mind of grudges and bitterness to bury the hatchet and settle the conflict.
2. Arbitration: Is a process by which a peace maker, arbitrator or peace panel settles the conflict through appealing to the conscience of those in conflict.
3. By Confrontation: The issue and problem can be subjected debate between those in conflict or neutral groups in order to expose the problem and convince the combatants of its emptiness.
4. In Boxing the Problem: The group or organization identities factors responsible for the conflict. The problem is examined carefully through a critical exudation of its aims and destroying the problem or exposing the triviality or the much ado-about nothing inherent in the identified problem(s)
5. Neglect or Silence: Can be used occasional by the chief Executives to prove to those in conflict that the conflict is not important to merit the attention of the administrator. Neglect or silence involves delaying tactics, which can disarm the combatant emotionally as they wait for days or months on end, without any practical action on the part of the chief Executive. The bottled –up emotion/anger can dwindle as the delay, neglect or silence continues to end the conflict caution should be taken in the use of this particular strategy, because, silence or neglect may also gather momentum one day to erupt like volcano which may do more destruction than good.

In resolving tertiary institution conflict, developing a constructive communication process and influential conflict negotiator's personality are very important. No doubt, schools cannot avoid experiencing one conflict or the other but a great deal of such conflict can be managed and be guided from disrupting school efforts towards attaining it manifest and latent goals if the conflicting parties are systematic in the way they communicate their grievances, situation of the conflict and readiness to negotiate for peace and if the negotiator mediating the resolution process is of good personality (Agbonna, Yusuf & Onifade, 2009).

Conflict management in school demand appropriate leadership style of the school administrator or chief executive .Demers in Magaula (2007) articulated three strategies of peaceful crisis resolution between and among warring parties, mediation, arbitration and reconciliation. Other strategies that can contribute to conflict management include effective catharsis, super-ordinate goals, empathy, grit theory, culture of civility, synergy, an address by an influential person, satisfaction of maslow's hierarchy of human needs, prayers and separation devices.

7. Conclusion

There is no doubt that just as conflicts abound in human beings so it is in tertiary institutions. The school administrator therefore needs managerial expertise and leadership qualities to bring the staff, students and communities together to fight a common course to create conflict free situation for academic success. Ola and Oyibo (2000). Observed that the current orientation is that conflict is an inherent aspect of every organization that dysfunctional conflict should be resolved, while functional conflict should be accepted and infact encouraged.

Nigerian leaders as well as management of tertiary institutions in the country also need to create avenues for discussing and designing popularly accepted non-violent strategy for managing conflicts.

8. Recommendations

It is recommended that school authorities in tertiary institutions should be more democratic in handling students' affairs, involve students in decision making process especially on issues that boarders on them. Students should be called for dialogue from time to time to curb conflicts. Authorities of tertiary institution should always embark or focus more on preventive strategies in order to reduce crisis rather than curative measures. Conflict management in tertiary institution requires giving consideration to problem solving techniques along with proper use of authority, observance of rules and regulations, proper structuring of institution, provision of adequate communication networks and encouraging meaningful participation of stakeholders in resolving conflicts. The strategy of the State in managing conflict need to be redesigned. For instance, the use of military operatives to trouble shoot crisis in tertiary institutions were not the best way of managing conflict as they had increased the number of casualties. In the work of Mohamedbhai as cited in Magagula (2007) courses on conflict management and resolution, peace education, civic education, good governance, basic and human rights, separation of powers of government, respect for the rule of law etc and teaching of peace as a General Nigerian Studies (GNS) with a view to making Nigerian tertiary institutions conflict free is recommended.

References

Adejuwon, K.D. & Okewale, R.A (2009). *Ethnic militancy, insurrections and democracy in Africa;* The case of Nigeria, journal of social and policy issues; Vol. 6, No 4.

Adeyemi, T.O, Ekundayo, H. T & Ahonge, H.O. (2010). *Managing students crises in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.* Journal of Research in National Development Vol. 1 June

Agbona, S.A; Yusuf, A. & Onifade, A.B. (2009).*communication and conflict manager's personality in school security and conflict management.* Being a text of paper presented at the 25th Annual National Conference of social students Association of Nigeria. Held at Michael Otedola college of primary education Noforija, Epe, Lagos State, from 17th to 20th Nov., 2009

Aguba, C.R. (2009). Educational administration and management: issues and perspectives. Enugu: Tons and Tons PDS.

Aja, O.J. (2012). *Conflicts as a barrier in tertiary institutions for national transformation.* A paper presented at the 31st Annual national conference of Nigerian association for education administration and planning (NAEAP) October, in Benue Hotels Makurdi.

Alabi, A.O (2010). *Management of conflicts and crises in Nigeria:* educational planner's view. Research journal of social sciences vol. 2 No 6.

Albert, I.O (2011). Building peace, advancing democracy, experience with the third party interventions in Nigeria's conflicts. Ibadan: John Archers publications Ltd.

Ayodele, J.B. & Adewumi, J.O (2007). *The incidence and management of conflicts in secular and non-secular tertiary institutions in south west Nigeria.* Educational research and review vol 2 (5).

Dunnette, M. (1976). Hand book of industrial and organizational psychology. Chicago; Randy Mc wally.

Gillin, C.T. (2004). *Conflict resolution, negotiation and team building.* Arts and contemporary studies Ryerson University.

Hanson, M. (1991). Education administration and organization behaviour. Massachusetts: Ally and Bacon.

Iyayi, F., Oshio, E. & Okojie, J. (2011). Critical issues in University governance in Nigeria Lagos: Malthouse press limited.

Kestener, B.P and Ray, L. (2002). The conflict resolution training programe leader's manual. Jossey-Bass, U.S.A.

Magagula, C.M. (2007). *Conflict resolution and management: the role of Africa higher education institutions.* Paper presented at a seminar celebrating the African University day at University of Swaziland, Kwaluseni. 15th November.

Ndu, A, Ocho, L.O. and Okeke, B.S. (1977). Dynamics of educational administration and management: the Nigeria perspective. Akwa: Mekks publishers Ltd.

Ola, R.F. & Oyibo, E.E. (2000) Administrative theories and their   applications, Ibadan: Amifitop Books.

Oloyede, I.O (1999). *Cultural pluralism as a challenge to effectiveness of University education in fostering the culture of dialogue and understanding.* paper delivered at the 2009 IAU conference on the role of higher education in fostering the culture of dialogue and understanding in Nigeria. Lebanon: Notre Dame University.

Posigha, B.E. & Ogbuvwa, V. (2009). *Conflict among library staff in Bayelsa and Delta States of Nigeria.* International journal of labour and organizational psychology. Vol.3, Nos 1 & 2.