CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

BY
Babatunde, V.O.: School of Basic and Remedial Studies, Kwara State College of Education
Ilorin, Kwara State; E-mail: babatundeolufunke2@gmail.com

Abstract
Conflict resolution is the process of taken actions in higher educational institutions to keep conflict from escalating beyond control. Conflict is a disagreement, strife, discord and hostility occurring in any human organization. It can be a misunderstanding between at least two interdependent parties, which often result in negative emotional states and behaviour. Conflict is inevitable between staff and management, staff and government students and management of higher institution. The paper looks at various causes of confliction and how it can be resolved. The paper therefore suggested that conflict can be managed through dialogue, provision of necessary infrastructures and social amenities were also discussed for a smooth effective administration of the school and high staff productivity.

Keywords: Conflict, Resolution, Education and Conflict management

Introduction
Conflict is a disagreement, strife, discord and hostility occurring in any human organization. It can be a misunderstanding between at least two interdependent parties, which often result in negative emotional states and behaviour. It is inevitable in our society and can lead to break down or destruction in such a way that individual or group concerned experience difficulty in working together (Kreitner and Kinichi, 2010). In higher institutions, Conflict may occur internally or externally between the Academic staff and management, Students and the School Authority, Students and the Academic staff, Nonacademic staff and the management, this can result in disorderliness and confusion. For institutions to carry out their functions very well, management, staff and students must be independent. Owenibe (2000) presented conflict as the result of poor and ineffective communication, a break down in normal communication, disagreement due to social, cultural, environmental and personality factors. It may occur when it is impossible for staff to carry out their desired action. This may lead to strike thereby reducing and interrupting productivity of the staff (Imhabekha, 2001). Also, aggrieved persons that often constitute themselves into a committee of concerned academics or non-academics may disturb the peace and academic calendar in an institution against its establishment (Adeyemi and Adenilara, 2012).

According to National Policy on Education (2013), the Nigeria institutions of higher learning was established to:
a. Contribute to national development through high level relevant man power training.
b. Develop and inculcate proper value for the survival of individual and the society.
c. Develop the intellectual capacity of individual to understand and appreciate their local external environment.
d. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-relevant and useful members of the society.
e. Promote and encourage scholarship and community service.
f. Forge and cement national unity.
g. Promote national and international understanding and interaction.
The actualization of these goals and objectives can only be possible in an atmosphere that is free of crises and conflict. Although conflict will always occur but a well-managed conflict will not degenerate to violence, since violence will not erupt without conflict. This can be managed by using communication, conflict manager’s personality in resolving the crises (Agbona, Yusuf and Onifade, 2009).

**Concept of Higher Educational Institutions in Nigeria**

Higher institutions are potent instrument for social, economic growth and political transformation of any nation. It helps to educate future leaders and develop the high level of technical capacities that promote economic growth and development (Odekunle, 2001). It is an instrument of social change and economic development, so no nation can develop technologically and economically without first investing heavily in its higher institutions. According to Bogoro (2015), higher education institutions are sources of knowledge and innovative thinking. They provide skilled personnel and credible credentials and contribute to innovation and improve productivity of nation. Although university is the peak of higher institutions, polytechnics and colleges of Education are also involved.

Okebukola (2008) opined that higher institutions provide the much needed human resources for activity improving the economy of nations and generating rapid changes. He asserted that the greater the opportunity given to citizenry for higher education, the more expansive the horizon for rapid social and economic development. It is a platform on which the future development of a nation rests (Anyin, 2012). In support, Obasanjo (2012) opined that a nation can only develop in relation to its achievement in education which its system are responsible for producing the skilled man power and knowledge needed for technological advancement and economic growth. According to Kazeem (2009), the 1980’s saw Nigerian Universities as excellent in academia and a pattern which the nations’ developmental hope rested. The working conditions were satisfactory and there were adequate academic staff and students had access to good accommodation, pipe borne water, regular supply of water etc. The environment was conducive for learning and the management relates leaders of the nation (Oyetakin, Oluwole and Kayode, 2012). This has now deteriorated due to different reform, change in policy, change in government, politics, and non-implementation of agreement by the government etc.

**Concept of Management**

Management is the process of mobilizing the available scarce human and material resources in an organization to realize stated goals and planned mission. Kinard (1998) defined management as the process directed towards maximum the potential of people and coordinating their efforts to attain some determined goals. Conflict management is a communication process for changing the negative emotional state to emotional state that allows working out a solution to the conflict. It is essential to resolve or control organization conflict through negotiation which is a communication process for enabling disputing parties to achieve an outcome with respect to their differences. The management is concerned with the activity through which employees are motivated and trained to effectively organize and manage financial and material resources by the effort of the leadership of an institution in order to achieve its objectives.

Conflict management connotes action taken to keep conflict from escalating beyond control. It implies ability to control the intensity of a conflict and its negative effect through negotiation, intervention and other diplomatic methods (Ajala, 2014). An understanding of what conflict is
and why it occurs central to being able to manage it (Ellis and Abott, 2001). If conflict is properly managed can lead to growth and development (Olufemi and Adewale, 2012). Not all conflict can be resolved but it can be managed. This is a process that involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self-awareness, conflict modes, communication skills and structure for resolution. People have different nature, so students, lecturers, management and government have to work harmoniously together in order to avoid conflict. Fatile and Adejuwon (2011) have said no meaningful development can take place in a crises ridden system as witnessed in the education institution in the country today. This results to revolts, protests, unrest, violence. Incessant closure of schools for months due to unrest has been a regular characteristic of Nigerian tertiary institution (Adeyemi, Ekundayo and Alonge, 2010). Conflict comes as a result of interactions with human interdependent (Adejuwon and Okewale, 2009). This can be intrapersonal, interpersonal or inter groups resulting to hostile reactions and strike action.

**Causes of Conflicts**

1. **Continuous competition for scarce resource** – Higher institutions need money for research, teaching, student amenities, student amenities, infrastructure, staff salary, welfare services etc. Inadequate provision from the government lead to decay in structure, decline in services and functions. This leads to frustration and aggression, gross mismanagement of available resources leading to strike, demonstration, boycott of lecture and violent riots.

2. **Perceived goal incompatibility** – The potential for conflict is likely to be high where groups or individuals perceive and interpret the same phenomenon differently. If students are not listened to, they may turn otherwise. For example, ban on University staff and student association or union, fear of premature retirement or rationalization of programme as a result of government overregulation result in decrease autonomy, decline in morale and goal displacement, internal transfer of staff or office can lead to crises.

3. **Management of style of the institution** – The management helps in the area of finances, academic programme, students’ committee system, personnel, welfare, reward system and physical facilities. Any lapses in any of these areas might lead to a revolt especially with a dictatorship style.

4. **Difference in values and life style** – Young adolescents experiencing freedom and independence in the higher institution campuses are filled with indecent dressing that may arouse the opposite sex, examination malpractice, secret peer associations, cultism, lack of social amenities like electricity and water, etc. The students not ready to obey the rules and regulations can also result to conflict between them and the management leading to strike action.

5. **Political and National Issues** - The government financial and administrative policies such as privatization, university autonomy and democratization of university management, politics in appointment of key officers like vice chancellor can lead to destruction of academic activities and calendar.

6. **Communication barrier** – Poor perception in communication and ignorance can degenerate into crises. This arises from misunderstanding or lack of well-defined communication network in a school organization. There may be a change in working practices, feeling of insecurity, confusion and resentment among the staff can lead to communication gap and conflict between the management and workers of the universities.

7. **Value conflict** - Divergent value and interest, non-payment of salaries, fringe benefit on time and refusal to grant vehicle loan can lead to conflict between the staff, management and the
government especially the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Federal government of Nigeria have been on industrial disharmony over non implementation of agreement reached by both parties by past administration.

**Conflict Management and Resolution Strategies**

In order to manage conflict, conflict management processes can be developed. This will enable the organization managers to develop appropriate strategies towards managing such a conflict. For example, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and Federal Government of Nigeria have been on industrial disharmony over non implementation of agreement reached by both parties. The agreement addressed issue of poor condition of service, problem of underfunding and infrastructural neglect in the university, lack of autonomy and Academic freedom. This is affecting the quality of teaching, research and scholarship in the university. Also, non-academic trade union agreement on funding, salary and allowance (Paul 2013). The federal government has to fulfill their portion of the agreement to avoid conflict and strike by developing a constructive communication process and influential conflict negotiation. The workers should be motivated in terms of remuneration, recognition, and reward for excellent task performance. Also for good prospects of self-development, involvement and participation in decision making process in the school system.

Also, there should be free flow of information as communication; this is significant predictor in establishing and understanding people. Information minimizing delays and ensures maximum utilization of resources for capturing, processing, storing, retrieving, relevant information between the university system as a whole and the government. They should be informed on how the university operates and university community needs to acquaint itself with the ways of the government. This will help to avoid delay of work, disinterest and lack of action and complete breaking down of the system. The way they communicate their grievances matter a lot, readiness to negotiate for peace between the two parties is important. Appropriate leadership style of the school management is also important to clarify goals and objectives of the system to avoid sudden dismissal of staff. Social amenities should be provided for the students on campus to avoid riot.

**Conclusion**

Conflict resolution is very important to call people to order through meaningful interaction and effective communication by resourceful and resource management. Cooperation between the university and the government would culminate into drastic reduction in negative conflict potential. This will change the structure of the organization, bringing expansion and opportunities for staff production. Also it will reduce the cost of parent spending and fast tract the graduation of students as at when due when there is no strike.

**Recommendations**

1. There should be improvement in communication channels between the management and staff to enhance staff productivity and sustenance of management of the institution.
2. The management should adopt a blend between industrial democracy and participation in decision making by the staff and students in order to reduce tension that will result to conflict.
3. The management and staff unions should adopt dialogue method for bargaining with the government rather than coercion to avoid strike action.
4. The Federal government should not politicize education but education agencies should rework poor condition of service of the staff of the higher institutions.
5. The Federal government should spend more on the education sector of the country by providing a good environment and infrastructure to make the learning process easier.

References


