CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN SOUTH EASTERN, NIGERIA

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Abstract- This study investigates how properly managed conflict can improve performance of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The sample comprised 1,200 respondents from all the government owned universities in south eastern Nigeria. The instrument for data collection was a 22-item structured Likert-type questionnaire found reliable with a Crombach Alpha coefficient of 0.78. The research questions were answered with the frequency tables and percentages with SPSS software version 20. The results show that organizational conflict between teaching-staff and school administrators, students and teaching-staff, students and school administrators; and students and non-teaching staff have no significant positive relationship on the performance of institutions of higher learning in south eastern Nigeria. It is then recommended among others that in the events of any organizational conflict, the personalities involved in the activities should not be attacked, instead, the problem should be the focus.

Keywords- Conflict Management, Institutions of Higher Learning, Organizational Performance, Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

The word conflict brings to mind images such as violence between parties, opposition processes and threats to cooperation (Uchendu, Anijaobi-Idem and Odigwe, 2013). Though, not every conflict comes in such forms especially in organizational setting. They come in a structure of wishes to be met, differences to be settled and/or thoughts to be shared which may eventually pilot a change of attitudes, feelings and perceptions. A great difference of opinions exists on the source and effect of conflicts on corporate performance and the effectiveness of the various strategies available for managing them. Some researchers have argued that conflicts are signs of a vibrant organization while others asserted that it is destructive and capable of impeding stability and profitability of organizations (Obasan, 2011).

It has been observed that the contemporary world is increasingly multicultural and the identity of crisis resulting from this sometimes threatens sustainable human development. This makes the promotion of understanding and dialogue to be a main concern in the management of multiculturalism, global peace and security (Oloyede, 1999). Efficient and effective management of conflicts is primary to the development of any society, but the prevailing situations in Nigeria constitute a reversal of this reality. Conflict in institutions of higher learning is unavoidable. It exists at every level of academic world. Conflict can be negative and can cause deep rifts in the framework of the institutions; it can as well be used as a tool to take the institution from stagnation to a new level of effectiveness. What makes the distinction is conflict management (Holton, 1998). Conflicts 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 the institutions of higher learning degenerated is because their antecedents were not appropriately managed (Agbonna, Yusuf and Onifade, 2009). The successful management of human resources is one of the solutions to optimal operation of an organization (Ezeanyim, 2011). For any organization to be successful in achieving its goal, the people in the organization need to have a shared vision of what they are striving for, as well as clear objective. However, the human elements required to facilitate goals attainment often engage in disagreement and variance over factors such as interest, views, style of management among others (Obasan, 2011). The reactionary effect is due to the perceived incompatibilities resulting typically from some form of interference or opposition is termed conflict. It is a state of disagreement over issues of substance or emotional antagonism and may arise due to anger, mistrust or personality clashes (Azamosa, 2004). Irrespective of the factors resulting in conflict, it has been observed that industrial conflicts produce considerable effects on organisations and should be consciously managed as much as possible.

In the institutions of higher learning, people with differing nature - students, lecturers and administrative staff have to work harmoniously together. The goal of university education is pursued through its main functions and activities of teaching, research, dissemination of existing and new information, service to the community, and being a storehouse of knowledge (FRN, 1981). In carrying out these functions, there are always conflicts within and among the categories of people within the school community, namely students, teaching staff, administrators and non-teaching staff. These

categories of people have different purposes and expectations from the institution. The non-teaching staff who performs support-function might feel unappreciated by both the superior academics and the potentially more prestigious 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. Also, the teaching staff 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.

A sea of studies has been focused on enhancing students' academic achievement or performance, academic staff performance and education managers' performance in the education system (Mathew, 2014). Measurement of Higher Education performance, especially in provision of services in institutions of higher learning is a complex issue that needed a sound conflict management process. It involves comparing public resources in terms of total amount of money expended, the personnel and other resources, with outputs such as students' academic performance, graduation rate and quality of research. Blanchard (2004) opined that good performance in higher learning is expected to bring positive growth to the country.

However, no matter how one looks at conflict, it is important to realize that conflict is one of the best ways in the world to turn the tide and improve unsatisfactory conditions. As a matter of fact, sometimes there may be no real dispute to be managed, but there may be need for greater understanding, cooperation and teamwork to promote interpersonal harmony and good organizational climate for teaching and learning. Therefore, conflict should not always be seen as something undesirable but rather as a necessary outcome that can bring positive consequences if properly managed. It is against this background that it becomes pertinent to examine the effect of organizational conflict on performance in the institutions of higher learning in Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

It has been observed that Nigerian institutions of higher learning have for decades been faced with so many crisis ranging from conflict between academic staff and school administrators, students versus Academic staff, students versus school authorities, non-teaching staff versus school administrators. Other problems include: management of limited resources, coping with increased student enrolment, poor performance of students in examinations, inadequate funding and all these hinders inter-personal relationships. The conflicts have given rise to distrust and hostility among professionals and academics thus contributing in hampering smooth, effective and efficient administration in the institutions of higher learning. It also appeared that despite these situations, stakeholders in education seemed to develop non-challant attitude towards these conflicts.

Among Researchers and Scholars, some are of the view that conflict posed a big threat to organizational performance (Mughal & Khan 2013, George, Miroga & Omweri 2013, Mba 2013, and Amineh & Ali 2014) while others are of the view that it is capable of increasing organizational performance (Sobia, Atif & Hira 2012, Uchendu, Anijaobi-Idem & Odigwe 2013, Etim & Okey 2013, and Zhimin & Ramani 2012). However, Hotepo, Asokere, Abdul-Azeez, and Ajemunigbohun (2010) stated that the effect of conflict (negative and positive) depends on how it is handled. This study therefore investigates how properly managed conflict can improve performance of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. What is the effect of organization conflict between teaching-staff and school administrators on performance of institutions of higher learning in south eastern Nigeria?
2. What is the effect of organization conflict between students and teaching-staff on performance of institutions of higher learning in south eastern Nigeria?
3. What is the effect of organization conflict between students and school administrators on performance of institutions of higher learning in south eastern Nigeria?
4. What is the effect of organization conflict between students and non-teaching staff on performance of institutions of higher learning in south eastern Nigeria?

II. METHODOLOGY

This study was a descriptive survey design. The purpose of a survey research, in the views of Ezejeluo, Nkamnebe and Nwanna (2008) is not the collection of data, per se, but the discovery of meaning in the data collected, so that facts and events can be better understood, interpreted and explained. The study is a descriptive survey because it adopts the use of questionnaires aimed at finding the effect of conflict management on organizational performance in the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. The population for the study is all the teaching staff, non-teaching staff and students of the government owned universities in South-Eastern, Nigeria (Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State University, Imo state University, Enugu State University and Ebonyi State University). Based on data from the personnel services unit and academic planning unit of the

universities, 2014/2015 Academic Session, the population of the study is therefore 14,040 teaching staff, 27,738 non-teaching staff and 147,483 students totaling 189,261 population in the 10 government owned universities in south eastern Nigeria.

The sample was made up of 400 teaching staff, 400 non-teaching staff and 400 students totaling 1,200 selected from the selected universities A structured questionnaire consisting of closed ended multiple choice-questions were employed for the survey. Hence, Likert scale having the ratings of "Very High Extent (4), High Extent (3), Low Extent (2), Very Low Extent (1) and No Extent (0)" was used. The data collected were quantitative. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to determine the internal consistency and reliability of the multiple item scales. Cronbach's alpha was adopted in this study because every items of the instrument was measuring an underlying construct (Leech, Barrett, & Morgan, 2005). A decision rule used in the study is based on the minimum acceptable level suggested by Nunnally (1978) which is 0.70. When Cronbach alpha test, alpha value is above 0.7, the result of this study would indicate an overall higher reliability factor. The alpha value for the construct indicated that the items that formed them had reasonable internal consistency reliability of 0.82. Hence the instrument was considered appropriate for the study (George and Mallery, 2003). This implies that the questionnaire is valid for measuring conflict management in the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the data analyses that answered the research questions were presented in Tables 1-5 respectively.

Research Question One: What is the effect of organization conflict between teaching-staff and school administrators on performance of institutions of higher learning in south eastern Nigeria? Questionnaire items 1 to 5 addressed the research question one which attempt to determine the extent organization conflict between teaching-staff and school administrators have on performance of institutions of higher learning in south eastern Nigeria.

Table: 1: Organizational Conflict Between teaching-staff and school administrators

S/N	Variables	Very High Extent	High Extent	Low Extent	Very Low Extent	No Extent
1	Marking and release of result within a timeframe causes disharmony	192(48%)	202(50.5%)	4(1%)	2(0.5%)	0
2	Sale of textbooks/handouts causes disagreement	167 (41.8%)	218(55.5%)	5(1.3%)	10(2.5%)	0
3	Irregular payment of salaries causes disharmony	174 (43.5%)	203(50.8%)	20(5.0%)	3(0.8%)	0
4	Appraisal and promotion of lecturers causes disagreement	157 (39.3%)	237(59.3%)	4 (1.0%)	2 (0.5%)	0
5	University academic calendar (duration of semester) can cause disagreement	48(12.0%)	127(31.8%)	130 (32.5%)	95 (23.8%)	0

Result in table 1 showed that marking and release of result 202 (50.5%), sale of textbooks/handouts 218(55.5), irregular payment of salaries 203 (50.8%), appraisal and promotion of lecturers 237 (59.3%) and academic calendar (duration of semester) 130(32.5%) causes disagreement between teaching-staff and school administrators in the institutions of higher learning in south eastern Nigeria.

Research Question Two: What is the effect of organization conflict between students and teaching-staff on performance of institutions of higher learning in south eastern Nigeria? Questionnaire items 6 to 9 addressed the research question two which attempt to determine the extent organization conflict between students and teaching-staff on the performance of institutions of higher learning in south eastern Nigeria.

Table: 2: Organizational Conflict Between students and teaching-staff

S/N	Variables	Very High Extent	High Extent	Low Extent	Very Low Extent	No Extent
6	Fixing time other than lectures time table causes disagreement	5 (0.7%)	231 (30.9%)	253 (31.6%)	478 (59.8%)	69 (8.6%)
7	Imposition of handout/textbook on students can cause disagreement	59 (7.4%)	343 (42.9%)	352 (44.0%)	23 (2.9%)	23 (2.9%)
8	Lack of class discipline can cause disharmony	0	209 (26.1%)	424 (53.0%)	167 (20.9%)	0
9	Supervision of research projects can cause disagreement	46 (5.8%)	167 (20.9%)	266 (33.3%)	255 (31.9%)	66 (8.3%)

The result of table 2 indicated that that fixing time other than lectures time table 498 (59.8%), imposition of handout/textbook on students 352 (44.0%), lack of class discipline 424 (53.0%) and supervision of research projects 266 (33.3%) students and teaching-staff within the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria at low extent.

Research Question Three: What is the effect of organization conflict between students and school administrators on performance of institutions of higher learning in south eastern Nigeria? Questionnaire items 10 to 13 addressed the research question three which attempt to determine the extent organization conflict between students and school administrators on the performance of institutions of higher learning in south eastern Nigeria.

Table 3: Organizational Conflict Between students and school administrators

S/N	Variables	Very High Extent	High Extent	Low Extent	Very Low Extent	No Extent
10	Increment in school fees can cause disagreement	133 (33.3%)	252 (63.0%)	15 (3.8%)	0	0
11	Imposing students union president on the students causes disharmony	161 (40.3%)	226 (56.5%)	13 (3.3%)	0	0
12	Rustication of students seeking for their welfare can cause disharmony	160 (40.0%)	214 (53.5%)	26 (6.5%)	0	0
13	Intra-Campus Transportation System can cause disharmony	0	55 (13.8%)	226 (56.5%)	93 (23.3%)	26 (6.5%)

Table 3 above revealed that increment in school fees 252 (63.0%), imposing students union president on the students 226 (56.5%), rustication of students seeking for their welfare 214 (56.5%), and Intra-Campus Transportation System 226 (56.5%) causes

disharmony between students and school administrators within the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria.

Research Question Five: What is the effect of organization conflict between students and non-teaching staff on performance of institutions of higher learning in south eastern Nigeria? Questionnaire items 14 to 18 addressed the research question five which attempt to determine the extent organization conflict between students and non-teaching staff on performance of institutions of higher learning in south eastern Nigeria.

Table: 4: Organizational Conflict Between students and non-teaching staff

S/N	Variables	Very High Extent	High Extent	Low Extent	Very Low Extent	No Extent
14	Collection and submission of course form sometimes leads to disagreement in my school	53 (6.6%)	322 (40.3%)	291 (36.4%)	79 (9.9%)	55 (6.9%)
15	Checking of results can cause disharmony	55 (6.9%)	319 (39.9%)	320 (40.0%)	79 (9.9%)	27 (3.4%)
16	Laxity on students documents can cause disagreement	0	346 (43.3%)	427 (53.4%)	27 (3.4%)	0
17	Omission of students names in book shop register can cause disharmony	0	134 (16.8%)	370 (46.3%)	270 (33.8%)	26 (3.3%)
18	Lack of discipline in the library can cause disagreement	0	215 (26.9%)	373 (46.6%)	162 (20.3%)	50 (6.3%)

The result of the table 4 showed that collection and submission of course form 322(40.3%), checking of results 320 (40.1%), laxity on students documents 427 (53.4%), omission of students names in bookshop register 370 (46.3%) and lack of discipline in the library 373 (46.6%) causes conflict between students and non-teaching staff within the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria.

Performance Indicator Questions

Questionnaire items 19 to 22 addressed the general performance of the institutions of higher learning in Anambra State.

Table: 5: Organizational Conflict Performance indicator

S/N	Variables	Very High Extent	High Extent	Low Extent	Very Low Extent	No Extent
19	Our university graduates students at record time	337 (28.1%)	456 (38.0%)	298 (24.8%)	74(6.2%)	35 (2.9%)
20	Our students are usually mobilize for NYSC at record time	263 (21.9%)	522 (43.5%)	303 (25.3%)	76(6.3%)	525 (3.0%)
21	Our university usually produce high quality of graduates yearly	187 (15.6%)	488 (40.7%)	525 (43.8%)	0	0
22	Research work from our students and staff usually contribute to knowledge	299 (24.9%)	416 (34.7%)	226 (18.8%)	222 (18.5%)	37 (3.1%)

The result of the table 5 that graduation of students at record time 456 (36.0%), students mobilization for NYSC at record time 522 (43.5%), production of high quality graduates yearly 525 (43.8%) and students and staff contribution to knowledge 416 (34.7%) respectively. This indicates that institutions of higher learning in Nigeria irrespective manages their conflict very well which in turn lead to better performance.

DISCUSSION

The finding indicates that conflict between teaching-staff and school administrators have a significant positive relationship on the performance of institutions of higher learning in Anambra State. It supports the work of Uzma, Zohurul and Sununta (nd) that conflict has an effect on the quality of education which is directly related to human resource potential development of the country. Theoretical postulation supposes that the presence of conflict within the organizational level will make performance to suffer. The finding shows that conflict between students and teaching-staff, students and school administrators and students and non-teaching staff does not have significant positive relationship on the performance of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Adeyemi, Ekundayo & Alonge (2010) in their findings supported this study that students' crisis in the tertiary institutions and the resultant consequence has been to the detriment of the teaching – learning atmosphere and should be discouraged. It is on this note that institutions of higher learning should understand that violence will not erupt without antecedents of conflict, one can assume that most of the conflicts degenerated because their antecedents were not appropriately managed (Agbonna, Yusuf and Onifade, 2009). Though it is worthy of note that successful management of human resources is one of the solutions to optimal operation of an organization (Ezeanyim, 2011). Institutions of higher learning should also be aware that for any organization to be successful in achieving its goal, the people in that organization need to have shared vision of what they are striving for, and clear objective.

CONCLUSION

For any organization to be effective and efficient in achieving its goal(s), the people in the organization need to have a shared vision of what they are striving to achieve, as well as clear objective for each team/department and individual. Based on the findings, the study posits that conflict management has positively influenced the performance in the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. It was categorically observed that conflict between students and teaching-staff; students and school administrators; students and non-teaching staff have positively influenced the performance of institutions of higher learning in south eastern states of Nigeria. Therefore, conflict should not always be seen as something undesirable but rather as a necessary outcome that can bring positive consequences if properly managed.

5.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. That in the events of any organizational conflict the personalities involved in the activities should not be attacked, instead, the problem should be the focus.
2. Organizations should find out if staff appointed to top management are adequately trained and prepared to occupy administrative positions in

public universities. This is because an untrained administrator may in the course of resolving or managing conflict create the one that will heavily affect the general performance of the university.

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