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EFFECT OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES ON ACADEMIC STAFF JOB PERFORMANCE IN STATE'S TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS, ADAMAWA STATE - NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of school administrators' conflict management strategies on academic staff job performance in state owned tertiary institutions in Adamawa state. The purpose of the study was achieved using descriptive survey research design with population of 1,301 consisting of 1,237 academic and 64 management staff. The research questions and hypotheses was answered and tested using descriptive mean and standard deviation statistics and z-test respectively. The study revealed that violation of school rules, breakdown in communication, failure to provide basic instructional materials are the major causes of conflict in Adamawa State owned tertiary institutions among others and to resolve such crisis school administrators often use collective bargaining, silence and give and take strategies. The study revealed no significant difference in the mean opinion of the respondents on the causes of conflict, conflict managing strategies and conflict have no significant effect on the academic staff job performance in Adamawa State owned tertiary institutions. Based on these findings, the study recommended that the states' tertiary institutions should adopt adequate conflict resolution strategies capable of resolving grievances that can trigger employees not to give their best in the work process and they should organize workshops and seminars for their staff on collaborative working relationship.

Key Words: School administrators, Conflict management strategies, Collective bargaining, Job performance

Introduction

Conflict manifests itself in human as natural and social occurrences in our daily living. How school administrators resolve them have an

inherent positive or negative effect on workers job performance which in turn can affect their effectiveness and efficiency. Most times, conflict emerges as a rational phenomenon in human norms that is why school administrators spend 20% of their useful time averagely resolving conflict between and among different stakeholders (Ahmed in Okoye and Okeke-Okonkwo, 2020). Staff job performance and effectiveness depend on the strategies used by the administrators in resolving conflicting issues when they arise. Effective school administrators are those known to manage conflict rather eradicating it as an efficacy function (Boucher, 2013).

Conflict is an incompatible and inevitable element in every human being; it is an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence, which occur due to incompatible pursuit of personal and/or organizational interests and goals. Based on this idea, the existence of individuals and groups of human beings living together creates a diversity of behaviours due to people's uniqueness in characteristics (Francis, 2004). When conflict occurs in an organization, there is the urgent need for its management to mitigate it so that it does not affect negatively workers' job performance and institutional goals. Bilgin (2018) argues that conflict is neither positive nor negative to organizational goal achievement but the way it is manage makes it either constructive or destructive. Problem occurs when destructive ways are used to resolve conflicts and that in turn causes stress, anxiety, loneliness, resentment, suppressed anger, fatigue and illness to those involved (Cornelius and Foure, 2001).

Conflict according to Schmidt and Kochan (2002) occurs when one party perceives the action of another party as blocking the opportunity for the attainment of a goal. They added that for conflict to happen in an organization, two prerequisites must be satisfied, namely: perceived goal incompatibility and perceived opportunity for interference or blocking. Because conflict is not necessarily all evil or all good but a mixture of both, it is good to note that conflict is a recurrent issue in every going concern. The overall implication of negativity often leads to low job performance.

Bukar (2018) affirmed that tertiary institutions, like other human organizations though different in some ramifications, are composed of learnt individuals and groups. It is an environment where a great diversity of relatively strong sub-cultures of academics co-exist

with different perception of ideas, opinion and lifestyle. Studies by Uchendu, Anijaobi-Idem and Odigwe (2014) and Okoye and Okeke-Onkonkwo (2020) revealed that poor recognition of teachers' autonomy, lack of objectivity, inadequate flow of information and perception of issues of interest are also causative agents of school-based conflict. When these exist in a school, academic staff finds it very difficult to contribute meaningfully towards goal achievement, which is central to the provision and actualization of qualitative education and goals of education as enshrined in the Nigerian National Policy on Education (2014).

When conflict arises in an organization, management apply diverse means at resolving it. Strategies for mitigating conflict are those techniques used in preventing, controlling or resolving conflicts. These strategies are very important to any school administration because it is through these strategies that negative or positive effects resulting from conflicts are minimized or uphold. These strategies include dominance, compromise, synergy, win-lose strategy, lose-lose strategy, win-win strategy, adjudication, collective bargaining, confrontation and neglect or silence (Okeke-Onkonkwo, 2020).

Ejiogu (2017) described effective job performance as worker's ability to produce higher than predicted gains or standard for achievement. It is also the degree of agreement between organizational goals and observable outcomes. According to Bukar (2018), effective job performance in an academic setup implies the extent to which the teacher successfully carries out the tasks of teaching, manage students' problems, relate well with colleagues, accept responsibilities and professional improvement. Academic staff job performance is an important element that has consequential implication on the performance of students and the quality of education generally which can be thwarted by unsolved crisis.

Unresolved conflict is one of the variables that can cause negative influence on the job performance of academic staff. Booker (2003) agreed that high level of interpersonal conflict negatively affects organizational commitment of academic staff. One could deduce from these and say that the job performance of academic staff heavily rests on the approach of conflict management style adopted by the school manager. Adamawa State government had established tertiary institutions for some social and economic benefits and for these

institutions to achieve their set goals, it would be necessary for all the stakeholders to constructively manage emerging and existing conflicts amicably. This would go a long way to improve academic staff job performance for its overall impact on the quality of education in the State. These institutions at one time or the other have experienced conflicts that affected the performance of their academic staff. Since the establishment of these institutions, there had been incidences of conflicts. Some of these bordered on issues that included poor staff conditions of service, desire to participate in school decision-making cycle/process, non-adherence to institution's recruitment and promotion procedures, training, and low staff work motivation. Although several attempts have been made to resolve these conflicts, more efforts were still required by the managements to douse the embers of latent conflict-prone issues in the institutions. This study is therefore, an attempt to determine the conflict management strategies used in these institutions and their adverse effect on academic staff job performance.

Statement of the Problem

Schools are learning environments that need peace and silent atmosphere as intended ideals (Takwate, 2021). Conflicts are inevitable where people coexist. Most tertiary institutions have been noted to be having high levels of conflicts despite administrators' efforts to curb its occurrence through different management styles. Academic staff are supposed to maintain good attitudes towards instruction of learners and colleagues under an ideal condition. They are supposed to do this with all amount of effectiveness in terms of having a positive attitude to work and many other good attitudes. Such effectiveness is expected to yield positive results in terms of improved academic performance of students. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be the case in Adamawa state owned tertiary institutions where many staff are observed to be ineffective in performing their duties as manifested in their irregular attendance to classes, lack of self-discipline, poor attitudes towards research and several other unacceptable professional attitudes that cannot contribute to the attainment of set educational objectives.

In an attempt to know why the above situation exists in these institutions despite all efforts by school administrators, many teachers

if asked attributed their ineffectiveness and inefficiencies to poor staff motivation, unresolved issues with school management or colleagues, poor working facilities, unfairness in recruitment and promotions, poor and irregular payment of salaries by the government, and so on. However, in recent time school managements have attempted to improve teachers' effectiveness, by allowing them go for retraining and development workshops on Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) sponsorship. The Adamawa state government have also improved in terms of prompt payment of salaries. Sadly, these efforts have not yielded any corresponding improvement. Conversely, many academic staff are still adamant and unwilling to change. It is as a result, the researcher wonders whether academic staff persistent ineffectiveness in these institutions could be due to poor conflict management strategies utilized in resolving crisis by the school administrators. Thus, the problem of this study put in question form is: what are the causes of conflict in Adamawa state owned tertiary institutions? What are the conflict management strategies utilized to resolve conflicts in the Adamawa state owned tertiary institutions? What is the effect of these strategies on academic staff job performance in Adamawa state owned tertiary institutions? An attempt to provide answer to this questions, made this study necessary.

Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this study was to determine the effect of school administrators' conflict management strategies on academic staff job performance in state's tertiary institutions, Adamawa state – Nigeria. Specifically the study:

1. Determine the causes of conflict in the Adamawa state owned tertiary institutions.
2. Identify conflict management strategies used in resolving conflicts in Adamawa state owned tertiary institutions.
3. Examine the effect of conflicts on academic staff job performance in the Adamawa state owned tertiary institutions.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. What are the causes of conflict in Adamawa State owned tertiary institutions?

2. What are the conflict management strategies utilized in resolving conflicts in Adamawa State tertiary institutions?
3. What is the effect of conflict on academic staff job performance in Adamawa State owned tertiary institutions?

Research Hypotheses

Three null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

HO₁: There is no significant difference in the opinion of school management and academic staff on the causes of conflict in Adamawa State owned tertiary institutions.

HO₂: There is no significant difference in the opinion of school management and academic staff on the conflict management strategies used by the school management in resolving conflict in the Adamawa state owned tertiary institutions.

HO₃: There is no significant difference in the opinion of management and academic staff on the effect of conflicts in Adamawa State owned tertiary institutions.

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Descriptive survey design starts inductively from observation and carefully stating the existing attributes of a particular event in the real world (Akinboye and Akinboye, 1998). Nwana (2005) described survey research design as the use of a sample to gather data, from which certain values are calculated to estimate the values in the population. The study target population was 1,301 respondents consisting of 1,237 academic and 64 management staff of Adamawa State University, Mubi; Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola; Adamawa State College of Education, Hong; Adamawa State College for Legal Studies, Yola; College of Nursing and Midwifery, Yola; College of Health and Technology, Mubi and Adamawa State College of Agriculture, Ganye. Purposive and randomly sampling technique was used to select one tertiary institution from each education zone in Adamawa state (Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola; College of Education, Hong; College of Health and Technology, Mubi and College of Agriculture, Ganye) except Numan education zone where none exists. The simple random sampling technique used, selected each respondent from the

population one at a time without replacement thereby giving member of the population chance of being chosen. The respondents was limited to only the school Registrars, Deans, Head of Departments and academic staff. The study adapted Chukwuemezie (2008) instrument and titled it to be Conflict Management Strategy Questionnaire (CMSQ) structured on four-point scale after adequate validation. The instrument (CMSQ) is widely used in conflict management related studies in Nigeria. Cronbach alpha was used to test the reliability of the CMSQ and it yielded coefficient of 0.85. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation statistics was used to answer the research questions and z-test was used to test the null hypotheses.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the causes of conflict in Adamawa State owned tertiary institutions? Results in Table 1.

Table 1: Causes of Conflict in the Adamawa State Owned Tertiary Institutions

| S/N | Items | Management staff | | Remark | Academic Staff | | Remark |
|-----|---|------------------|----------|--------|----------------|----------|----------|
| | | \bar{x} | δ | | \bar{x} | δ | |
| 1 | Poor attitude of management staff in resolving conflict | 2.54 | 1.21 | Agree | 2.32 | 1.32 | Disagree |
| 2 | Violation of school rules and regulations by academic staff | 2.63 | 1.22 | Agree | 2.86 | 1.17 | Agree |
| 3 | Lateness to lectures | 2.51 | 0.28 | Agree | 3.01 | 1.18 | Agree |
| 4 | Inadequate distribution of available teaching and learning materials. | 3.00 | 1.18 | Agree | 2.72 | 1.42 | Agree |
| 5 | Unfair delegation of responsibilities among academic staff | 2.92 | 1.29 | Agree | 2.81 | 1.23 | Agree |
| 6 | Breakdown of communication among/between academic staff and | 2.76 | 1.21 | Agree | 2.84 | 1.27 | Agree |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| | management. | | | | | | |
| 7 | Ineffective leadership styles | 2.65 | 1.18 | Agree | 1.95 | 1.43 | Disagree |
| 9 | Failure to implement collective agreement by management | 2.67 | 1.22 | Agree | 2.65 | 1.51 | Agree |
| | G | 2.71 | 1.10 | Agree | 2.65 | 1.32 | Agree |

= Mean, δ = Standard Deviation, **G** = Grand Mean

From table 1, the respondents unanimously agreed that lateness to lectures, poor distribution of materials, and unfair delegation of responsibilities, poor communication and failure to implement collective agreement are common causes of conflict in Adamawa state tertiary institutions. The respondents disagree on poor attitude of management in resolving conflict and ineffective leadership style to be cause of conflict in these institutions. They agreed on the entire item listed with the grand mean and standard deviation of 2.71 ± 1.10 and 2.65 ± 1.32 respectively as causes of conflict.

Research Question 2: What are the conflict management strategies utilized in resolving conflicts in Adamawa State tertiary institutions? Results in Table 2.

Table 2: Conflict Management Strategies used Adamawa State Owned Tertiary Institutions

| S/N | Items | Management Staff | | | Academic Staff | | |
|-----|----------------------------|------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|
| | | δ | Remarks | Δ | Remarks | | |
| 10 | Cooperation | 2.74 | 1.26 | Agree | 2.23 | 1.21 | Disagree |
| 11 | Accommodating each other | 2.32 | 1.21 | Disagree | 2.25 | 1.28 | Disagree |
| 12 | Avoidance approach | 2.81 | 1.15 | Agree | 2.73 | 1.25 | Agree |
| 13 | Silence | 2.75 | 1.25 | Agree | 1.62 | 1.31 | Disagree |
| 14 | Compromise (give and take) | 2.54 | 0.28 | Agree | 2.56 | 0.15 | Agree |
| 15 | Collaboration | 2.34 | 1.18 | Disagree | 2.28 | 1.19 | Disagree |
| 16 | Collective bargaining | 2.63 | 1.20 | Agree | 2.67 | 1.21 | Agree |
| 17 | Confrontation | 2.38 | 1.18 | Disagree | 2.62 | 1.20 | Agree |
| | G | 2.57 | 1.09 | Agree | 2.56 | 1.10 | Agree |

= Mean, δ = Standard Deviation, **G** = Grand Mean

Evidence from table 2 shows the strategies used in resolving conflict in state owned tertiary institutions in Adamawa state with grand mean and standard deviation of 2.57 ± 1.09 and 2.56 ± 1.10 for school managers and academic staff respectively. The respondents disagree that accommodating each other and collaboration strategies are not utilized in resolving conflict issues.

Research Question 3: What is the effect of conflict on the academic staff job performance in Adamawa State owned tertiary institutions? Results in Table 3.

Table 3: Effects of Conflict on Academic Staff Job Performance

| S/N | Items | Management staff | | | Academic staff | | |
|-----|--|------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|
| | | \bar{x} | δ | Remark | \bar{x} | δ | Remark |
| 18 | Low morale to work effectively | 2.65 | 1.16 | Agree | 2.59 | 1.24 | Agree |
| 19 | Discouragement to put effort in teaching | 2.41 | 1.29 | Disagree | 2.61 | 1.19 | Agree |
| 20 | Resentment | 2.76 | 1.18 | Agree | 2.57 | 1.23 | Agree |
| 21 | Loss of concentration on assigned work | 2.48 | 1.13 | Disagree | 2.60 | 1.18 | Agree |
| 22 | It leads to violence among staff | 2.83 | 1.16 | Agree | 2.23 | 1.21 | Disagree |
| 23 | It lead to untimely suspension of academic staff | 2.65 | 1.15 | Agree | 2.81 | 1.17 | Agree |
| 24 | High labour turn-over that causes shortage of trained and effective academic staff | 2.63 | 1.15 | Agree | 2.64 | 1.15 | Agree |
| 25 | Low self-esteem among academic staff | 2.58 | 1.23 | Agree | 2.66 | 1.14 | Agree |
| 26 | General strike that may affect academic programmes | 2.67 | 1.17 | Agree | 2.92 | 1.11 | Agree |
| | G | 2.60 | 1.18 | Agree | 2.63 | 1.15 | Agree |

= Mean, δ = Standard Deviation, **G** = Grand Mean

Table 3 showed the effect of unresolved organizational conflict on academic staff job performance. The study revealed that such conflict causes low staff morale, staff resentment to work, untimely suspension the academic staff, labour turn-over, low self-esteem and often strike with grand mean and standard deviation 2.60 ± 1.18 and 2.63 ± 1.15 for management and academic staff respectively.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the opinion of school management and academic staff on the causes of conflict in Adamawa State owned tertiary institutions.

Table 4: z-test of the Causes of Conflicts in Adamawa State Owned Tertiary Institutions

| Respondents | N | δ | z-critical | z-cal. | Remarks |
|------------------|-------|----------|------------|--------|----------------|
| Management Staff | 64 | 2.71 | 1.10 | | |
| Academic Staff | 1,237 | 2.65 | 1.32 | 1.96 | 0.461 Accepted |

Table 4 shows no significant difference in the mean opinions of the respondents in respect to the causes of conflict in Adamawa State tertiary institutions with a calculated z-value 0.461 and the critical z-value is 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated z-value is less than the table value, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the opinion of management and academic staff on the conflict management strategies often adopted to manage conflict in the system.

Table 5: z-test of the Strategies used in Resolving Conflicts in Adamawa State Owned Tertiary Institutions

| Respondents | N | δ | z-crit. | z-cal. | Remarks |
|------------------|-------|----------|---------|--------|----------------|
| Management Staff | 64 | 2.57 | 1.09 | | |
| Academic Staff | 1,237 | 2.56 | 1.10 | 1.96 | 0.077 Accepted |

The result in Table 5 revealed no significant differences in the mean responses of respondents on the strategies used by school management in mitigating conflicting issues in Adamawa State tertiary institutions with z-value is 0.077 and the critical z-value is 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated z-value is less than the table value, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the opinion of management and academic staff on the effects of conflicts on academic staff job performance in tertiary institutions in Adamawa State.

Table 6: z-test of the Effect of Conflicts on Academic Staff Job Performance in Adamawa State Owned Tertiary Institutions

| Respondents | N | | δ | z-crit. | z-cal. | Remarks |
|------------------|-------|------|----------|---------|--------|----------|
| Management Staff | 64 | 2.60 | 1.18 | | | |
| Academic Staff | 1,237 | 2.63 | 1.15 | 1.96 | -0.217 | Rejected |

Evidence in Table 6 indicates a very high level of no difference between the respondents mean responses since z-value calculated is -0.217 and critical z-value is 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Since the z-calculated is less than the table value, the null hypothesis was not rejected. The conclusion is that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of academic staff and management staff on the effect of unresolved conflict on academic staff job performance tertiary institutions.

Discussion of Results

The purpose of the study was to determine the effect of school administrators' conflict management strategies on academic staff job performance in Adamawa State tertiary institutions. The discussion is therefore, based on the findings of the study. Results in Table 1 revealed that the cause of conflict in Adamawa state tertiary was due to poor attitude of school managers in resolving conflict issues, poor attitude of staff to their work, inadequate instructional resources, breakdown in communication and failure of school administrators to implement collective agreement among others. This study collaborates Opeloye (2006); Uchendu, Anijaobi-Idem and Odigwe (2014) and Ahmed (2015) studies that revealed that inadequate flow of information and perception of issues of interest are causative agents of school-based conflict and it affect teachers' meaningful contribution to the cause of teaching - learning which is central to the provision and actualization of qualitative education. A study by Mehrad (2015) also indicates that where conflicts are poorly managed, there could be low

job performance among the teachers leading to high rate of teachers' turnover and poor academic performance.

In response to the conflict management strategies (Table 2), the respondents unanimously agreed with very slight differences in opinion that administrators in Adamawa state owned tertiary institutions often use avoidance approach, collaborative agreement and collective bargaining strategies in resolving conflicting matters with grand mean 2.57 ± 1.09 and 2.56 ± 1.10 respectively. This collaborated the study by Arop, Owan and Ekpang (2018) that the joint utilization of these conflict management strategies have a significant influence on teachers' job effectiveness and cooperative coexistence in an organization. This finding is contrary to Okoye and Okeke-Okonkwo (2020) study that revealed integration conflict management style yield better result than avoidance and collaborative strategies in resolving conflict. While the third research question (Table 3), established that unresolved conflict leads to low staff morale, work resentment and untimely resignation, suspension of academic staff and these affect job performance and it agrees with Wang and Wu (2020) study.

The first hypothesis no significant difference in the mean opinions of the respondents on the causes of conflict with z-calculated 0.461 and z-critical 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. The implication of this result is that both the academic and the management staff agreed on the causes of conflict. No significant differences was found in the mean responses of the respondents on the strategies used by school management in mitigating conflicting issues in Adamawa State tertiary institutions with z-value is 0.077 and critical z-value is 1.96. Study by Sherif and Sherif (2019) supported this finding that conflict resolution strategies of cooperation, accommodation, avoidance, compromise, and collaboration was identified as vital instrument in resolving conflict of interest in an organization.

The result of the study (Table 6) showed no difference between the mean responses of respondents who agreed that unresolved organizational conflict adversely affect work performance. This study concurred with the study conducted by Agbo (2020). The study revealed a positive relationship between conflict management and work performance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study revealed that school administrators' conflict management strategies affect job performance of academic staff in state owned tertiary institutions of Adamawa state. Collaborative, bargaining and avoidance conflict management strategies are so much utilized by administrators in resolving conflicting matters in these institutions and the more these strategies are used, the more likely they will be able to boost the morale of the work force effectively. This will be significant to academic staff because institutional conflict(s) are resolved to improve employees' condition of service and it will also be significant to researchers in other States in Nigeria as a reference point.

Recommendations

1. Institutions should adopt adequate conflict resolution strategies in order to reduce accumulation of unresolved grievances that can trigger employees not to give their best in the work process.
2. There is need for these institutions to organize workshops and seminars for their staff on collaborative working relationship. This will help employees to be accommodative.
3. School administrators should adopt the compromising conflict management strategy when dealing with issues to encourage work effectiveness.

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