

Conflict Management Strategies as Predictor of Peace Culture among Undergraduate Students in Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract. This study investigated the impact of conflict management strategies in maintaining peace culture in academia especially among the undergraduates. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design of an ex post facto type. Two research hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Data were collected using a self-developed instrument and one already validated instrument. The questionnaire was administered on a sample of 1800 participants that were randomly selected from 6 universities in South West Nigeria. Data were analysed using descriptive analysis, regression and t-test Statistical Analysis. The findings of this study indicated significant prediction of the use of conflict management strategy on peace culture among undergraduates ($F_{(1,1798)} = 18.709$; $P < .000$). The study also indicated a significant difference in the undergraduate perception of university peace culture ($MD = 8.38$; $t = 5.205$; $P < .05$). It is therefore recommended that the school management should ensure that non-violent means is employed as an intervention technique for conflict resolution in schools. This will encourage peaceful co-existence and teamwork between students, staffs and other members of the school community.

Keywords: conflict management, strategies, peace culture, undergraduates

1. Introduction

When human beings come together there is bound to be conflict. This is because human beings have different background, interests and worldviews. These lead to differences in opinion. These differences in opinion could sometimes degenerate into aggression and violence. This conflict may first be noticed at the individual level but may eventually spread to the larger society. But it is important to note that just as peace and cooperation is desirable, conflict could be progressive when not allowed to

become destructive. Thus, conflict is considered healthy if there's opposing ideas pertaining to the nature of the business and the advantage is for the improvement of work processes. But in the context of personal conflict, the organization faces a great predicament which needs to be urgently bargained between the two parties (Mughal & Khan, 2013).

Conflict can have a good outcome if it's being handled appropriately. It provides the opportunity of learning from each other, improves workforce and builds good team solidarity. However, when it does get out of hand, it is necessary to break a long-term resolution base on understanding of its underlying causes. This will ensure that resurgence does not arise. However, conflict is commonly defined as an open clash between two opposing groups or individuals. Usually, the disagreement may be as a result in compatibility of views, opinion or access to shared resources.

All the world over, it is no mere saying that humankind needs to take lessons from its past in order to build a new and better tomorrow. The main reason behind this is to ensure that every society, community, organization, and home learns to prevent our violence-ridden history from repeating itself, promotes the values of peace, non-violence, tolerance, human rights and democracy that must be inculcated in every woman and man – young and old, children and adults alike.

Today's world, its problems and challenges are becoming increasingly more interdependent and interconnected. The sheer magnitude of this requires everyone to work together. No time is more appropriate than now to build a culture of peace. No social responsibility is greater nor task heavier than that of securing peace on our planet on sustainable foundation. Global efforts towards peace and reconciliation can only succeed with a collective

approach built on trust, dialogue and collaboration. For that, we have to build a grand alliance for a culture of peace among all, particularly with the proactive involvement and participation of the young people.

However, a culture of peace should be seen as the essence of a new humanity, a new global civilization based on inner oneness and outer diversity. The flourishing of a culture of peace will generate the mindset in everyone that is a prerequisite for the transition from force to reason, from conflict and violence to dialogue and peace (Olanrewaju, 2014). Culture of peace will provide the bedrock of support to a stable, progressing and prospering world for all (UNESCO, 2015).

Education is a critical tool through which citizens of any country acquire the right knowledge, skills, values, attributes and attitudes for peaceful living within the society. With well managed education, people's attitudes and behaviours to violence can be redirected to the development of skills that support economic regeneration and sustainable livelihood. Within the developed countries, nations like Japan have recognized the important role played by education for peace building included in the objectives of education for the peace of Japan. Nigeria can only attain sustainable social, economic and political development when there is peaceful co-existence, cooperation and mutual tolerance among the citizens.

Peace culture is one of the major factors that catalyses the sustainability of any institution of higher learning. Lack of peace in universities and other institutions of higher learning would trigger acrimony, hatred, tension, mistrust, mutual suspicion, instability of the system and dissatisfaction among staff (Romina, 2015). All these would hinder academic productivity within the system. Existence of a peaceful institutional climate indicated by love for one another, where faculty members are closely knitted together as one family, caring for each other, openness, trust, compassion, justice and fairness would facilitate cross fertilization of ideas and enhance knowledge creation and academic productivity, efficiency and effective management of the institution for the attainment of academic excellence in universities (Romina, 2015).

Well managed education can be used as a significant tool for promoting knowledge, values, skills and attitudes that will help in bringing about needed behavioural changes which will enable citizens of Nigeria including youths and adults, majority of

whom are university students and who are highly vulnerable to violence, to resist violence and any form of conflict.

In spite of the enormous benefits derived from university education in nation building, Nigerian universities had over the years gradually deteriorated from citadels of learning to "centres of violence" (Rotimi, 2005). According to Liberman, Levy and Segal (2009), the latent force of educational system in developing countries like Nigeria is frequently disillusioned by long-standing problems of programme reforms, changes in policy, and onslaught of conflicts. Thus, contrary to the high expectations of the founding fathers whose vision and dream were to see that Nigerian men and women were equipped with university degrees equivalent to what obtained in Western countries, Nigerian universities have been plagued with conflicts (Oni, 2012). The realization of the dream and vision of the founding fathers is almost becoming an illusion and movement towards global relevance has become a difficult task which can be partly attributed to unmanaged or mismanaged conflicts within the system.

However, a university environment where there is peace will facilitate cross fertilization of ideas, skills, knowledge creation and dissemination. This is so because academic activities would go on undisturbed. Therefore, this study tends to investigate the impact of conflict management strategies in maintaining peace culture in academia especially among the undergraduates.

2. Statement of the Problem

When conflicts arise, organizational performance may deteriorate. This is because conflict can make employees frustrate one another at the detriment of the organization. Conflict also leads to interpersonal disharmony in the organization which makes attainment of goals difficult. Attaining of organizational goals is possible if efforts are always made to reduce the overall level of conflict within the organization by creating a peaceful culture environment. Consequently, it is very imperative that efforts are made towards finding ways of managing conflict so as to achieve university educational objectives. The problem of poor conflict management in the university environment is the focus of this study. Organizations have a shorter lifecycle today because of various changes in the operations of the organization. These organizational changes may cause turbulence and uncertainties that in turn create conflict. Nigerian Universities over the years have

been facing conflicts in various dimensions that have reduced its performance.

Within the universities and other institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, there have been secret cult activities which resulted to killing, raping of female students, injuries and maiming of people. Insecurity of live and insurgence have become the order of the day in Nigeria. The federal government has made several efforts aimed at combating the activities of Boko Haram and other issues bothering on insecurity of lives of citizens of the country. Additionally, administrators of institutions of higher learning have built in measures to checkmate the activities of cult groups.

Despite all efforts of government and institutional administrators, there is insecurity of life everywhere in the country. Literature is replete on peace culture and conflicts management strategies, but majority of the literature are studies conducted in foreign countries. There are limited studies cover peace culture and conflicts management strategies in Nigerian universities. This study attempts to fill the gap by providing empirical investigation on strategies towards effective management of education for building a culture of peace in academia.

3. Research Hypotheses

In order to achieve the goals of this study, the following hypotheses will be tested:

- There is no significant prediction of the use of conflict management strategy on peace culture among undergraduates.
- There is no significant gender difference in the perception of peace culture among undergraduates.

4. Methodology

Design: This study employed ex-post – facto research design in which the existing status of the independent variables were only determined during data collection without any manipulation of the variables by the researchers.

Sample: Sampling was done through a simple random procedure. There are six States in the South-west Nigeria; sampling of the States was done through simple random sampling techniques of which three States were selected. From each of the states two Universities were purposively selected (one private and one public). In all six (6) universities, three hundred final year undergraduate students (100

each from Arts, Sciences, and Social Sciences) were randomly selected from each of these schools, making a total of one thousand eight hundred (1800) participants in all. This sample included 1111 females (61.7%) and 689 males (38.3%). Their ages range between 16 and 25 with a mean of 20.1 and standard deviation of 7.38.

Instrumentation: Two validated instruments were used for collection of data for the study. They are: Conflict Management Strategy Scale (CMSS): Conflict Management Strategy Scale was developed by Olanrewaju (2014). This instrument is a “5” point Likert type scale consisting of 21-items. The internal consistency reliability coefficient was .941. Findings also demonstrated that item-total correlations ranged from .63 to .97. Test-retest reliability coefficients was .90.

Peace Culture Scale (PCS): PCS was a self-developed questionnaire by the researchers to tap into the peace culture experienced within the university by the students. It is a 15-item scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The reliability was ascertained through test-retest method within two weeks intervals. The validity co-efficient index of 0.75 and a test-retest reliability of 0.81 were obtained. Thus, the instrument was reliable and valid to use.

Procedure: The researcher administered the measuring scales, which guarantee confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents, personally with the assistance of three trained research assistants. The researcher consulted with the Registrars and the Deputy Registrars of the selected tertiary institutions, in order to intimate them with the purpose of the study. The researcher with the help of four other trained research assistants visited the universities’ faculties to administer the instruments directly on the subjects on the earmarked days for the seminar presentation by the faculties. The researcher explained all aspects of the questionnaire to the respondents. The researcher through the help of the Deputy Registrars was able to administer the questionnaire with ease. The cooperation received made it possible to have 100 per cent rate of return. However, it took the researcher a period of six weeks to administer and retrieve the distributed measuring scales.

Method of Data Analysis: The data collected through the questionnaires was analyzed using percentage and frequency counts for demographic information about the respondents. Hypotheses were tested using Multiple Regression Analysis, and t-test at 0.05 alpha levels.

5. Results

Table 1: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis between conflict management strategy and peace culture

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.514 ^a	.164	.136	12.62564

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	41.018	1	41.018	18.709	.000 ^b
	Residual	12395.412	1798	6.894		
	Total	12436.430	1799			

a. Dependent Variable: Peace culture

b. Predictors: (Constant), conflict management strategy

In Table 1, in examining the regression analyses results, it was observed that the constructed models in the study were significant ($F_{(1,1798)} = 18.709$; $P < .000$). It is observed that conflict management strategy significantly predicts peace culture among undergraduates significantly with 13.6% of variance explanation percentage. Therefore, the hypothesis that stated that there is no significant prediction of the use of conflict management strategy on peace culture among undergraduates by this finding was rejected. The implication of this finding is that the use of conflict management tools or strategies will enhance the university peace culture.

This is supported by Olaleye and Arogundade, (2013), which was of the opinion that when conflict arises between student –students and management-students, a good communication system is advisable of which dialogue is a good conflict management strategy leads to school peace which improves a positive relationship among all members of the educational institution. Neale and Bazerman (2011) supported this by stating that mutual agreement involves interdependent parties who consent with the other parties and come to a logical agreement on issues. The use of mutual agreement allows students and management to have a win-win in all conflict that occurs in the school community because it gives room for each party to tender their grievances’ and accept each other solutions. This was supported by Ibegbu (2011) who stated that opinion polls give room for all that are affected by the conflict to give a free and fair view on the cause of the conflict. He stated that opinion polls refer to opinion poll as an occasion where people are asked questions to discover what they think about a particular subject or issue. This will promote peace culture among undergraduate students in tertiary institution.

Table 2: Independent t-test analysis of differences in the perception of male and female students of peace culture

	N	X	Sd	Mean Diff.	Df	t-cal	P
Male	689	48.07	16.89	8.38	1798	5.205	.000
Female	1111	56.45	13.11				

Results in Table 2 indicated a significant difference in the undergraduate perception of university peace culture ($MD = 8.38$; $t = 5.205$; $P < .05$). The null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, female undergraduates have more positive perception towards peace culture (56.45) compared to undergraduate males (48.07). It is pertinent to note that when students are represented during decision making by the school management, conflict is reduced because students make their plights known and the school management can tackle the prevalent issues which affect the students. Sound management of students is therefore required where the school management needs to ensure that the students’ activities and operation in educational institutions are well monitored. This calls for the action of the management team of universities who are properly grounded in the techniques of conflict management.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is deducible from this study that conflict management tools can be used to resolve conflicts among undergraduate students.

The following recommendations have been made in light of the findings:

- The school management should ensure that non-violent means is employed as an intervention technique for conflict resolution in schools. This will encourage peaceful co-existence and teamwork between students, staffs, and other members of the school community.
- School management should provide communicative and participative processes

in which students and individual members of staff will have opportunities and freedom to express their views and opinions on issues and in administrative decision making.

- The government and school management should provide good physical conditions, enough resources, equipment and other necessary facilities to schools to avoid conflict arising from such inadequacies.

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