Student-Authority Conflict in Nigerian Universities

Florence Aduke Adebayo
Faculty of Education, University of Ado-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Abstract: The study researched into the student-authority conflict in Nigerian universities. The population consisted of 32 states and 27 federal universities in Nigeria. Simple and purposive random sampling techniques were used to select 30 universities and 600 respondents. Instrument designated Students-Authority Conflict (SAC) was used. The reliability coefficient of the SAC was 0.825. Data collected were analyzed using percentage. The findings revealed that conflict is inevitable in both federal and state universities. However, insecurity of lives and properties were identified as the major cause of student-authority conflict. Based on the findings, authority should give prompt attention to the security of lives and property. Students should be involved in decision making concerning their welfare. Situational type of conflict management strategy was recommended for the managers.

Key words: Authority, conflict, inevitable, insecurity, institutional-function, management-strategies

INTRODUCTION

Conflict functions in any organization. It functions where there are two or more persons in a group (student-student, student-authority) and where, the managers have to deal with peoples lives, self-concept, ego sense of mission or purpose. Mwuese (2008) believed that conflict is a normal part of man's social relation. No human organization is immune to conflict. Thus, it is safe to say that students come to schools with different experiences, attitudes, fears, backgrounds, hopes and aspiration, which may lead to conflict between groups. Ibukun (1997) explained conflict as difference between two or more parties that results in mutual oppositions. Hence, before a conflict could occur, there must be a group, some contest over an interest and a disagreement.

Conflict is therefore, an inevitable phenomenon in any organization. Nigerian universities as a social organization do experience conflicts between different groups within its jurisdiction. Therefore, from observation student-authority conflict seems to be as old as the institution of formal education itself. Aina (1977) postulated that students-authority conflict is consequential to the second world war. The researcher further maintains that students have been protesting often violently for over two and a half centuries in American universities. Hence, student's unrest had its roots from American Universities. In 1957, the Nigerian universities students of university college Ibadan had its first experience protesting over the setting up of a barbed-wire barricade that was allegedly designed to curtail unlawful movement in and out of the halls of residence. This protest against the authority was followed

by 1960 protest against the Anglo-Nigerian defense, which students feared would have serious political independence on Nigeria. For example in 1971, a 2nd year undergraduate of the university of Ibadan lost his life in the protest that originated from issue arising over poor meals, poor administration and increase in tuition. Dawan *et al.* (1997) identified 14 times of occurrence of students conflicts in Nigerian Universities between 1961 and 1974. Equally, the Higher Education News (2003) of the federal ministry of education reported the trend of nationwide close of universities from 1993-2003 and put the aggregate total number of months lost at 30-namely 1993-3 months, 1994-6 months, 1995-4 months, 1996-7 months, 1999-1 month and 5 days, 2000-2 months, 2001-3 months, 2002-25 days and 2003-5 months and 5 days. Awosusi (2005) study identified the manifestation of conflict in the form of staff-management conflicts, students-management conflicts, Staff-government conflicts, students-students conflict and staff-staff conflicts. The study blamed this in the proliferation of universities, outrageous lower population of students and economic recessions sandwiched with frustration. Gurr (2004) argues that frustration is bound to lead to aggression, which tends towards violent conflicts. This frustration was widespread in the case of the Nigerian university system and the aggression was consequently, all pervasive.

Therefore, the issue of student-authority conflict became a problem to be resolved by the universities heads in Nigeria and this could not be resolved due to awareness and technological development. Since, the Universities harbours a good number of students, who are adolescents, students-conflict is therefore, inevitable.

University authority feels that their rights as leaders are threatened while, the students feel that their interests are suppressed. The assumption creates a situation of grievance and conflict between the students and the authority.

Students want to participate in decision making on matters that affect their lives for example provision of educational facilities, supply of light and water, accommodation and so on. If the students are prevented from participating on these issues, conflict may develop. This has become a concern not only for parents, teachers and advocates. Hence, the researcher investigated the causes, conflict management strategies and profound probable solutions to reduce student-authority conflict.

Statement of problem: It was observed that there were growing awareness among students that they have a measure of power and that they can wield some influence in social and political matters in general and in school matters in particular. The discovery of this latent power finds expression in various ways that could be constructive or destructive. Even through, students have attempted to and succeeded in correcting some social and political ills, there is still an apparent rise in students-authority conflict in this country, Nigeria.

Secondly, the general public whether justly or unjustly, holds the universities highly accountable for students behavior and production of manpower. Teachers and school authorities are often blamed for an alleged moral and academic laxity and under-baked manpower. Whereas, students are from different backgrounds with differences in their levels of tolerance to situation. Hence, students do react violently to some issues within the university system and these do lead to students-authority conflict. Therefore, if conflict is to be reduced, there is need to research into the causes, management strategies and proffer probable solutions for effective management of this cankerworm in Nigerian universities.

The following questions would be answered:

- What is the level of occurrence of student-authority conflict in Nigerian Universities?
- What are the causes of student-authority conflict in Nigerian Universities?
- What are the influences of student-authority conflict on the institutional functions in Nigerian universities?
- What are the conflict management strategies adopted by the authorities of Nigerian Universities?
- How effective are the strategies adopted for resolving student-authority conflict situations in Nigerian universities?

The aim of this study is to find out the causes and probable solutions to students-authority conflicts in Nigerian Universities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Significance of the study: This study would be of great assistance to the universities authorities in resolving student's conflict issue since probable solutions to nip conflict such as strategies to be adopted would be highlighted. The government would be able to address its roles to resolve student's conflict in the universities by funding the institutions, adequately.

Guidance and counseling unit would be of great assistance to resolve students-authority conflict. Student's body would show the need to be patient, understanding and handle conflict through dialogue rather than violence.

Research methods: This study is a descriptive survey type. The population consists of 32 state and 27 (FME, 2008).

Simple random sampling technique was used to select 15 state and 15 federal universities. While, purposive random technique was used to select 300 student union leaders and 300 academic staff union of universities from the 30 universities. They were used to complete the instrument designated Students-Authority Conflict (SAC). Five hundred and eighty-five questionnaires were retrieved and analyzed using percentages.

RESULTS

Research question 1: What is the level of occurrence of student authority conflict in Nigerian universities?

Table 1 shows that 10 federal universities felt that the student-authority conflict is very frequent while, 5 federal universities felt that the frequency of student-authority conflict do occur occasionally. However, the 15 state universities do agree that student authority conflict do occur frequently in their institutions.

Research question 2: What are the causes of student-authority conflict in Nigerian universities?

In the Table 2, all the factors with percentage above 50 are regarded to be associated with student-authority

Table 1: Occurrence of student-authority conflict in Nigerian universities

Category of university	Conflict in Nigerian universities		
	Frequently	Occasionally	Total
Federal	10	05	15
State	15	-	15

Table 2: Causes of student-authority conflict in Nigeria universities

Causes of conflict	No. of respondents	No. of agree responses	Agree responses (%)
When authority imposes decision on student without being communicated or consulted	585	403	68.9
When there is strong allegation of corruption in higher places in an out of campus	585	360	61.5
When there are inadequate or lack of social amenities such as transport and health facilities	585	507	86.7
When authority fail to guarantee security or lives and property on campus	585	580	99.0
When there are inadequate educational facilities, e.g., libraries, lecture theartre	585	550	94.0
When freedom of speech and of association are deprived	585	493	84.3
Over choice of leadership	585	305	52.1
When some students are invited to appear before a disciplinary panel	585	101	17.3
When students union leaders are arrested and detained	585	467	79.8
When the school fees and registration fees are too high	585	460	78.6

Table 3: Influence of conflict

Influence of conflict	No. of respondents	No. of agree responses	Agree responses (%)
The institution is closed down	585	397	67.9
Student leaders are dismissed or suspended	585	135	23.0
Destruction of lives and property	585	157	26.8
New challenges for better functioning and growth of the universities are acquired	585	505	86.3
Stir creativity and stimulate invention that lead to improvements	585	450	76.9

Table 4: Conflict management strategies adopted by the Nigerian universities authorities

Conflict management and strategy	No. of responses	No. of agree responses	Agree responses (%)
Holds meetings and dialogue with the students to resolve issue (Dialogue)	585	392	67.008
Invoke rules and regulations and assert authority (Autocratic)	585	252	43.070
Leaves issue to resolve themselves (Lazier-Faire)	585	193	32.900

Table 5: Effectiveness of the conflict management strategies of the leader

Effective of strategies	No. of respondents	No. of agree responses	Agree responses (%)
Students had always given credit to the authority	585	299	51.10
Authority had always allowed conflict to degenerate into violence in the way they had been managed	585	210	35.80
The management of conflict crises have been effective and authority had performed well in crises management	585	345	58.90
Authority had always failed in the way conflict had been managed	585	164	28.03

conflict. In other words, the prevalence of these factors except for item 8 would be enough to upset the peace between the student and university authority.

Research question 3: What are the influences of student-authority conflict on the institutional function in Nigerian Universities?

In Table 3, all the factors with percentage above 50 are adjudge to be common influences of student-authorities conflict on the Universities. This implies that numbers 1, 4 and 5 were noted to be usual influence of student-authority conflict while, numbers 2 and 3 occurred sparingly.

Research question 4: What are the conflict management strategies adopted by the authorities of Nigerian Universities?

Table 4 shown that 392 (67%) respondents agreed that Nigerian universities authorities adopted the dialogue strategy while, 252 (43%) and (33%) adopted autocratic and lazier-faire strategies, respectively. It is Therefore,

the views of the respondents that the Nigerian Universities adopted dialogue, autocratic and lazier faire management strategies to manage student authority conflict.

Research question 5: How effective are the strategies adopted for resolving student-authority conflict situations in Nigerian universities?

The results in Table 5 show that 345 (58.9%) and 299 (51.1%) respondents indicated that the management of conflict have been effective and that the authorities had performed well in conflict management and hence, students had always given credit to the authorities. While, 210 (35.8%) and 164 (28.03%) respondents indicated that authorities had always allowed conflict to degenerate into violence in the way they had been managed and hence, authorities had failed in the way conflict had been managed. Implicit in this finding therefore, strategies used for resolving student conflict in Nigerian universities had been effective to some level.

DISCUSSION

This study revealed that student-authority conflict does occur frequently in the state universities than in the federal universities. The study is in agreement with Ayodele and Adewumi (2007) study that revealed conflict as common to both federal and state universities and also Nwankwo (1977) findings on student conflict behavior that failure to achieve interposition perceptual congruence on a focal situation can result in violent crisis within the group but at variance with Isoken (1990) that revealed low occurrence of student-authority conflict in the secondary schools of some local governments in Edo state. This could imply that the level was higher in the universities than secondary schools.

The most sensitive causes of conflict as revealed were when the authorities fail to guarantee security of lives and property on campus and when, educational facilities are inadequate, these factors could be enough to upset the peace between the students and the universities authorities. The influence of student-authority conflict on the institutional functions resulted to new challenges for better functioning and growth of the Universities as shown on tables. This implies that respondents considered conflict as beneficial, which confirm the view that conflict today is not only unavoidable but, sometimes desirable. It equally reaffirm that conflict can be functional to the organization if not carried to an extreme.

Dialogue, autocratic and lazier-faire strategies were adopted by the universities administrators to solve student conflict. However, this finding contracts Obiegbu (1994), who stated that Nigerian administrators solely utilized the technique of force (autocratic), which was inherited from the colonial government. The perception of the respondents indicated that the dialogue strategy is mostly used. This agreed with Burnel and Vogi (1990), who found that the dialogue strategy are used by administrators of organization in studies done in advanced countries and also, with Davis (2009) study in win to win relationship that catches flies with honey than with vinegar.

From the finding only 58.9% respondents agreed that the management of conflict crises had been effective and authority had performed well in conflict management but, agreed that the managers should not allow conflict to degenerate into violence before attended to so as to prevent occurrence. However, the researcher felt that if the management of the conflict had been effective as view by the respondents, the frequency ought to be less than what was experienced in Nigerian universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That well organized conflict training should be incorporated with a leadership training package for all appointed heads of Nigerian universities for better management of conflict to foster peace by the National universities commission and reviewed periodically to share experiences by the leaders. The managers or heads of universities should adopt situational type of conflict management strategies to resolve students-authority conflict that is two or more strategies could be combined to nip conflict in Nigerian universities. Managers should establish conflict committees to settle conflict matters. It is equally necessary for the leaders to have grapevines and mobilize intelligence section of the security unit to report conflict situations to the appropriate quarters for immediate action. Counseling and guidance clinic should be well equipped to handle conflict situations with tact and experience.

Managers should have periodical meetings with the student's union government to rub minds on the welfare of the students body and other pressing issues. Government funds have been found to be insufficient. The exigency of the job now demands that the authorities of the institution should generate more funds internally to supplement government grants in order to meet the institution expenses as regard the provision of educational facilities for better teaching and learning. Students should show understanding, patience, and consideration to the authority and give room for dialogue rather than violence. Students should cultivate a culture of peace and preferring one another. Also students should not view the heads as buffer between themselves, society and government but more as persons playing a supporting role towards their moral and academic achievement

CONCLUSION

Since, student-authority conflict is inevitable and could create creativity and stimulated invention that leads to improvements managers should adopt the best management strategy (situational) to nip it down to avoid constant violence.

REFERENCES

Aina, D.T., 1977. Student unrest in selected secondary schools in Western Region Nigeria. University of Lagos Post Graduate Books of Abstracts 1970-1995.

Ayodele, J.B. and J.O. Adewumi, 2007. The incidence and Management of conflicts in secular and non-secular Tertiary Institution in South West Nigeria. http://www.academicjournals.org/ERR.

Awosusi, O.O., 2005. Relationship between Work alienation and industrial conflicts. A study of academic staff of Universities in the South-West Nigeria. http://www.unadportal.org.

Burnel, N. and I. Vogi, 1990. Side conflict mediation for students. Mediation Quart., 7: 237-250.

Dawan, P., G. Fand and Moore, 1997. An empirical study of the nature and sources of government-universities conflict and their management in Nigeria 1948-1993. Research Project. http://www.NUC.org.ng.

Davis, P., 2009. Students conflict dispute resolution to peace. http://www.ezinearticles.com.

FEM, 2008. Federal Ministry of Education. Database. http://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng.

Gurr, J.O.E., 2004. Issues in Educational Administration. 1st Edn. Empathy International, Enugu. ISBN: 978-33848-0-5.

Higher Education News Abuja, 2003. Federal Ministry of Education. http://www.NUC.org.ng.

Ibukun, W.O., 1997. Educational Management. 1st Edn. Theory and Practice Nigeria. Green Line Publishers, Lagos. ISBN: 978-31762-5-0.

Isoken, B.E., 1990. Conflict and administrative effectiveness of principals in selected secondary schools in oredo local government. University of Benin Books of Abstract 1985-1995.

Mwuese, K.G., 2008. Schools and System of Violence, Peace and Conflict Resolutions. http://f/kni/ Archive. cfm.htm.

Nwankwo, J.J., 1977. Perception of the Administration Roles of the principal and the school climate as factors in student conflict behaviour. University of Ibadan Books of Abstract1970-1985.

Obiegbu, J., 1994. Sources of internal conflicts in Nigerian Universities, Social Science Council of Nigeria Proceedings 1960-1990.