



CONFLICT RESOLUTION AS A MECHANISM FOR PROMOTING GOOD HUMAN RELATIONS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN CROSS RIVER STATE.



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Abstract

This study assessed conflict resolution as a mechanism for promoting good human relations in public universities in Cross River State. One research hypothesis was formulated to achieve the purpose of the study, using a cross sectional correlational research design. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select subjects totalling 700 non-teaching staff of public universities. The instruments used for data collection were two questionnaires named “Conflict Resolution Strategies of Departmental Heads Questionnaire (CRSDHQ) and Good human relations Questionnaire (GHRQ)” constructed by the researcher. Simple linear regression statistic was used as statistical tool for data analysis. The hypothesis was tested at .05 level of significance. The findings of the study indicated that conflict resolution strategy had significant positive influence on effective communication, mutual respect and teamwork as well as the overall good human relations in public universities in Cross River State. It was therefore recommended that to improve good human relations in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, departmental heads should promote a culture of open communication and respect; and create systems of report, investigation and response to rude behaviours in the workplace for proper redress.

Key words: Conflict resolution, good human relations.

Introduction

The essence of tertiary education lies in its role as a catalyst for both individual advancement and societal progress. Beyond their core mandate of knowledge dissemination and research, these institutions shape the values, character and worldview of future leaders, professionals and change makers. For tertiary institutions to fulfil this transformative role, it is essential that an environment that is not only intellectually stimulating, but welcoming and grounded in mutual respect, effective communication, trust and reliability, empathy and emotional support, and teamwork and cooperation be cultivated. Such an atmosphere nurtures personal development and encourages healthy academic and social interactions and upholds the dignity of all members of the academic community.

Within the workforce of tertiary institutions are administrative support staff who play a critical role in facilitating the effective functioning of academic departments. Their primary responsibility is to provide essential support services to Heads of Departments, academic staff, students, and other stakeholders. As integral members of the institutional framework, these personnel contribute significantly to the smooth operation of departmental activities by managing daily administrative tasks. Their core responsibilities encompass providing day-to-day administrative support; managing documentation and filing systems; retrieving records as needed; responding to inquiries and supplying relevant information to students and staff; and preparing official correspondence, reports, memos, and other departmental documents. In addition, they are tasked with verifying and processing student and staff records, assisting in the organisation and execution of departmental events, and supporting such events as they occur.

In recent times, the researcher, alongside other concerned stakeholders, has observed with dismay a decline in the professional conduct of certain categories of non-teaching staff, particularly with regard to their attitude towards work. This has been notably reflected in their poor interpersonal relations with Heads of Departments, lecturers, and students. Instances of impoliteness, ineffective



communication, lack of courtesy, and general disregard for staff and student needs have been reported. These include delayed or inadequate responses to documentation requests, reluctance in retrieving necessary records, and a lack of responsiveness in providing vital information. Such behaviour undermines the expectations of a tertiary institution, where a culture of mutual respect, professionalism, and trust should be paramount to positively impact on student experiences. Rather than fostering a welcoming and supportive environment, affected non-teaching staff interactions have at times left students and colleagues feeling embarrassed, intimidated, or disrespected. This concerning pattern prompted the researcher to reflect on whether the observed deterioration in human relations among this group is a result of deeper, unresolved workplace conflicts that have developed over time.

Conflicts have been noted to be the reason for poor teamwork and a lack of mutual respect among staff. Conflict is a product of the incompatibility of goals, and it arises from opposing behaviours (Bua, Ada & Akinde, 2015). Adetunji and Adetunji (2018) argued that conflict is a state of serious disagreement and argument about something perceived to be important by at least one of the parties involved. John-Eke and Akintokunbo (2020) viewed conflict as any perceived opportunity which can exist for interfering with the other's goal attainment. For Tamunomiebi and Nsirimovu, (2020) conflict refers to a situation in which there are incompatible goals, cognition or emotion within or between individuals or groups that lead to opposition. According to them, the definition recognises three basic types of conflict; goal conflict which arises when the desired outcomes are incompatible between groups, cognitive conflict which arises as a result of incompatibility of ideas, and affective conflict which arises when there is an incompatibility in emotions. Lastly, they asserted that conflict can also arise when two or more values, perspective and opinions are contradictory in nature and have not been agreed upon.

Conflict resolution according to Bawah and Uddin (2019) involves implementation of strategies to limit the negative aspects of conflicts and increase the positive aspects of conflict at a level equal to or higher than where the conflict is taking place. Rahim (2001) identified conflict resolution strategies to be accommodating, avoiding, collaborating, compromising and competing. Olaleye and Arogundade (2013) investigated conflict management strategies employed by university administrators in Nigeria using a descriptive survey approach. The result revealed the following as the most commonly used strategies in descending order: dialogue, participatory-decision-making, mediation, prevention, persuasion, use of ad-hoc committee, emergency and avoidance. These strategies were also found to be most effective in promoting good human relations.

Effective human relations refer to the ability to build and maintain positive, respectful, and productive interactions with others in personal, social, or professional settings. It involves understanding human behavior, showing empathy, communicating clearly, and promoting cooperation and mutual respect. It involves good communication skills, active listening, emotional intelligence, mutual respect and trust, conflict resolution ability, positive attitude and teamwork (Nwankwo, 2024; Lubega, 2025; Amele, 2019, Omene, 2021). Adu, et al., (2015) addressed the role of communication in managing conflicts to ensure healthy relationships. They posited that conflict management fosters and improves upon relationships at work which in turn translates to increase in performance. Consequently, good communication and mutual trust can be associated positively to conflict management, Nordin et al., (2014).

Amongst the varied roles of Heads of department is staff management which according to Nnaji (2016) involves the management of employee skills, knowledge, competencies, abilities, talents and attitudes to conform to school standards and achieve educational goals. This means that the HODs as departmental managers can play a crucial role in managing conflicts and creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. Conflict resolution strategy is therefore a process by which heads of department resolve disagreements and maintain a peaceful co-existence among non-teaching staff to ensure optimum performance of staff in their duties. Ofiemun et al. (2022) assert that a Head of Department's inability to effectively resolve workplace disputes can foster unhealthy rivalry among subunits and individuals within an organisation, ultimately giving rise to negative workplace attitudes. Similarly, Nwokonko (2019) emphasises that when subordinates exhibit negative attitudes toward



work, it not only hampers their productivity but also weakens the professional relationship between staff and their supervisors.

Therefore, conflict management is a critical component of effective personnel management, particularly given the inevitability of conflict in organisational settings. Conflicts may arise at various levels and, if not promptly and appropriately addressed, can escalate into crises that compromise staff performance and institutional harmony. The capacity of a departmental head to manage conflicts constructively and sustain a peaceful, cooperative work environment is essential for fostering positive human relations among staff, students and others.

Statement of the problem

Effective human relations are vital to the creation and maintenance of a healthy, productive, and supportive workplace. Institutions that invest in open communication, mutual respect, and collaboration often report improved organisational performance and greater satisfaction among stakeholders. In the context of public tertiary institutions, however, recurring concerns have been raised by both students and academic staff regarding the attitudes of non-teaching personnel. These concerns primarily centre on perceptions of impoliteness and unapproachable attitude, which are particularly unsuitable with the esteemed role of higher education institutions as centres of learning and key agents of national unity and social cohesion. Such negative attitudes may stem from unresolved inter-departmental, intra-departmental or interpersonal conflicts, which, when left unaddressed, manifest in strained interpersonal interactions.

The presence of poor human relations contributes to a workplace atmosphere characterized by tension and unfriendly atmosphere, where individuals may feel undervalued, ignored, or disrespected. This, in turn, undermines teamwork, diminishes stakeholder satisfaction, and tarnishes the institution's public image.

Given the mandate of Heads of Departments to manage staff performance in alignment with institutional values and to promote a culture of excellence, collaboration, and respect, it is pertinent to consider how the implementation of conflict management strategies could serve as a mechanism for improving human relations within the non-teaching workforce.

Research Objectives

The purpose of the study was to find the influence of conflict resolution on good human relations. Specifically, the study aimed to find how conflict resolution strategies influence good human relations in terms of their effective communication, mutual respect and teamwork

Research Hypothesis

Conflict resolution does not significantly influence good human relations in terms of effective communication, mutual respect and teamwork.

Methodology

Research design

This study employed a cross-sectional survey research design, which is commonly utilized to explore and evaluate individuals' thoughts, opinions, and perceptions at a specific point in time. The survey method involves the administration of a structured set of questions to a representative sample, enabling researchers to generalize findings about the attitudes and behaviours of the larger population from which the sample is drawn.

This design was deemed appropriate for the present study as it allowed the researcher to collect data through a questionnaire administered to non-teaching staff. The purpose was to elicit information regarding the conflict resolution strategies employed by HODs and their perceived impact on human relations within public universities in Cross River State. The data obtained were subsequently analysed to draw inferences about the relationship between the independent variable, conflict management and the dependent variable good human relations.



Population of study

The population of the study consisted of all 2,792 non-teaching staff employed in academic departments across 3 public universities in Cross River State. This information was obtained from official records provided by the respective institutional registries.

Sampling technique

Stratified random sampling technique was used to select subjects to participate in the study. The first stage involved the stratification of the population into the two (2) categories of public universities involved in the study (federal and state) in the State. The second stage involved the random selection of 25% of the total number of non-teaching staff working in each academic department in the three public universities in the State as respondents for the study using a purposive sampling method.

Participants of the study

The sample for the study comprised 700 non-teaching staff (246 males and 454 females) selected from 3 public universities in Cross River State during the 2024/2025 academic session.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for data collection in this study were two questionnaires titled “conflict resolution Strategies of Departmental Heads Questionnaire (CRSDHQ) and Good human relations Questionnaire (GHRQ)”. The CRSDHQ comprised two sections. Section A of the CRSDHQ elicited information about the name of the institution and department, while section B elicited information about conflict resolution strategies. Section B of the instrument was measured on a modified 5-point Likert type scale ranging from Always (A) to Never (N). The response pattern for section B were Always (A =5), Often (O=4), Sometimes (S=3), Rarely (R=2) to Never (N=1) for all positively worded items and the scoring was reversed for negatively worded items. While Section A of the GHRQ measuring good human relations used a modified 4-point Likert type scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD). The validity of the instrument was determined by three experts, two in educational management and one in test and measurement. Data collected for the study were analysed using regression analyses with the aid of SPSS 26.

Results

Hypothesis

Conflict resolution does not significantly influence good human relations. The independent variable in this hypothesis is conflict resolution, while the dependent variable is good human relations in terms of effective communication, mutual respect and teamwork, as well as overall good human relations. The hypothesis was analysed using Simple Linear Regression, tested at .05 level of significance to determine the influence of conflict resolution on good human relations as presented in Table 1.

The results in Table 1 showed that the adjusted (standardized) R-square for conflict resolution and effective communication ($Adj R^2 = .357$) indicated that the variation in effective communication could be explained by 35.7% contribution of conflict resolution, while that of conflict resolution and mutual respect ($Adj R^2 = .191$) indicated that the variation in mutual respect could be explained by 19.1% contribution of conflict resolution.

Table 1

Simple regression analysis results of the influence of conflict resolution on good human relations in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State (N=700)

| Variables | Source of variation | ofSS | Df | MS | F-ratio | Sig | Adj R ² |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|-----|----------|----------|------|--------------------|
| Effective communication | Regression | 626.329 | 1 | 626.329 | 461.382* | .000 | .357 |
| | Residual | 1126.729 | 830 | 1.358 | | | |
| | Total | 1753.058 | 831 | | | | |
| Mutual respect | Regression | 389.287 | 1 | 389.287 | 197.001* | .000 | .191 |
| | Residual | 1640.131 | 830 | 1.976 | | | |
| | Total | 2029.418 | 831 | | | | |
| Teamwork | Regression | 423.482 | 1 | 423.482 | 178.034* | .000 | .176 |
| | Residual | 1974.283 | 830 | 2.379 | | | |
| | Total | 2397.764 | 831 | | | | |
| Overall good human relations | Regression | 4268.740 | 1 | 4268.740 | 533.918* | .000 | .391 |
| | Residual | 6635.952 | 830 | 7.995 | | | |
| | Total | 10904.692 | 831 | | | | |

*Significant at .05 alpha level; $p < .05$.

On the other hand, for conflict resolution and teamwork (Adj R² = .176) indicated that the variation in teamwork could be explained by 17.6% contribution of conflict resolution, while that of conflict resolution and overall good human relations (Adj R² = .391) indicated that the variation in overall good human relations could be explained by 39.1% contribution of conflict resolution.

Further examination of the results revealed that the F-ratios of 461.382, 197.001, 178.034 and 533.918 with p-values of .000, .000, .001 and .000 obtained for effective communication, mutual respect and teamwork as well as the overall good human relations respectively were all statistically significant, since the p-values are less than .05. This then implied that the null hypothesis which stated that conflict resolution does not significantly influence good human relations was rejected for effective communication, mutual respect and teamwork as well as the overall good human relations. Based on these, it was concluded that conflict resolution had significant influence on effective communication, mutual respect and teamwork as well as the overall good human relations in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State.

Discussion of findings

The results of the null hypothesis indicated that conflict resolution strategy had significant positive influence on effective communication, mutual respect and teamwork as well as the overall good human relations in public universities in Cross River State. This then implies that to improve good human relations in public universities in Cross River State, departmental heads should promote a culture of open communication and respect; and create systems of report, investigation and response to rude behaviours in the workplace.

The findings coincided with Okoli, Okeke and Nuel-Okoli (2017) who researched on conflict management and Nigerian public university employees' job commitment in the South East region of Nigeria using a survey research design. The population incorporated all public university employees in the country's south-east region and a sample of 210 randomly picked subjects made up the sample. Data collected for the study were analysed using PPMC and the results indicated integrating style as a significant correlate of job commitment among the employees. By implication, the finding simply



meant that the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate was accepted. This study was regarded as being worthy of review in accordance with its investigation of the relationship between a conflict resolution style and employees' job commitment.

The findings also concurred with Arop, Owan and Ekpang (2018) who researched on administrators' utilisation of conflict management strategies and secondary school teachers' job effectiveness in Obubra LGA of Cross River State, Nigeria adopting a factorial research design. A sample of 464 teachers within the local government area in the State was used for the study and data collected from them were analysed using multiple regressions. The result revealed that when combined together, all three contributed significantly to teachers' job effectiveness. On the other hand, when their individual contributions were analysed, each of dialogue and effective communication were significant contributors while arbitration was found to be an insignificant contributor. The finding thus conveyed the impression that each of dialogue and effective communication were better conflict resolution styles than arbitration.

Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of conflict resolution on good human relations in public universities in Cross River State. The study's objective was to find out how conflict resolution strategy influence good human relations. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The use of this design was justified because information was collected from the respondents through a series of written questions (questionnaire), posed to non-teaching staff to obtain information about administrative strategies of departmental heads and staff job performance in tertiary institutions in Cross River State. It was discovered that conflict resolution strategies had a significant positive influence on effective communication, mutual respect, teamwork and overall good human relations in public universities in Cross River State,

Recommendations

Heads of department should promote a culture of open communication and respect; and create systems of report, investigation and response to rude behaviours in the workplace.

Departmental heads should ensure that role conflict does not exist among staff when tasks are assigned, and disagreements should be resolved quickly to encourage teamwork and mutual respect among staff and with others.

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