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EXTENT OF ADOPTION OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES BY ADMINISTRATORS FOR PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study determined the extent conflict management strategies were adopted by administrators for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South, Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study, while four null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Related literature pertinent to the study were reviewed which exposed the need for the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted, using a population of 1,598 administrators in all the 18 federal tertiary educational institutions (eight federal universities, seven federal polytechnics and three federal colleges of education) in South-South Nigeria. A sample size of 320 administrators was used for the study. The sample size was derived using the Taro Yamani formula. A structured questionnaire developed by the researcher was used for data collection. Cronbach Alpha method was used to establish the reliability of the instrument. The reliability yielded coefficient values of 0.81 and 0.80 for the two clusters and an overall reliability value of 0.81. Data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and ANOVA. The results showed that administrators adopted third party involvement and consultation strategies at a moderate extent in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria. The results also showed that there were no significant differences in the mean ratings of the respondents on the extent of adoption of third party involvement and consultation strategies for peaceful co-existence on the basis of type of institution

and years of experience. Based on the findings, the researcher recommended that tertiary institution management should organize conferences, workshops and seminars to create awareness on the negative effects of conflicts in the institutions on staff and students. This will encourage peaceful co-existence and team spirit for the smooth running of the institutions.

Keywords: Conflict management strategy, third party involvement, consultation, peaceful coexistence and tertiary institutions.

Introduction

Education is a critical tool through which citizens of any country acquire the right knowledge, skills, values 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. Education according to Onyebuenyi, Mbah and Odeluga (2017) provides a means of transferring ideas, cultural values, norms and livelihood to members of the society. Education as an industry may exist in several levels such as primary, secondary and tertiary education.

Tertiary educational institutions are institutions where knowledge is imparted to its seekers and researches in various fields of human endeavour. Tertiary institutions are at the post-secondary level of the national education system and it include universities, polytechnics, colleges of technology, colleges of education, advanced teacher training colleges, correspondence colleges and such institutions as may be allied to them (FRN, 2014). These institutions are established to meet the nation's need for socio-economic development through knowledge-sharing, research and development. Tertiary educational institutions are the institutions that create peaceful and sustainable societies by strengthening the teaching and understanding of shared knowledge, values and attitudes enabling individuals to live together in diverse environments.

Higher educational system comprises a variety of communities based on the wide range of academic disciplines and functions. Internally, tertiary institutions in Nigeria are shaped by various forces. These include external and internal forces within the institutional frameworks that constitute constraints to administrative efficiencies. The combination of external and internal pressures within the system make administration very difficult and complex, therefore conflict is inevitable. Many tertiary institutions in Nigeria are residential institutions with municipal characteristics such as halls of residence, staff quarters, medical centres, water scheme, staff school among others. All these are managed by administrators, professionals and academics alike (Olaleye & Arogundade, 2013). In the course of carrying out their duties or roles, they are bound to have conflicts. When disagreements among people in a social environment remain unsolved, they graduate into conflicts.

Conflicts have given rise to distrust and hostility among professionals and academics, thus contributing in hampering smooth, effective and efficient administration in universities, polytechnics and colleges of education (Fareo & Jajua, 2018). Conflict is defined as a by-product of the interaction of people or groups with different expectations, interests and backgrounds in the society. Conflicts can hinder an organization's performance and the attainment of its goals. It can lead to stress, frustration, dissatisfaction, high turnover, absenteeism and poor performance among employees. Conflict can be a destructive force but if properly managed, it can become useful as a source of renewal and creativity, as managers can assemble different pieces of information to yield productive results.

Conflicts are often seen and experienced in educational institutions as a result of the nature of the functional and relational characteristics of various academic departments. Similarly, educational institutions are perfect breeding grounds for conflict as a result of the academic freedom existing there, whereby the academic staff are more independent in their approaches and viewpoints. Conflicts have made managements of educational institutions in Nigeria to be the spotlight throughout the country. Educational institutions' conflicts in Nigeria are phenomena of great concern. Incidence and severity of institutional conflict has and continues to destroy the basic environmental conditions required to provide good environment for developing human resources for Nigeria (Umana, 2020). The chaotic situation has undermined many programmes aimed at enhancing the impartation of knowledge and skills in future human resources for the country. As in many developing countries, Nigerian higher institutions witness series of organizational conflicts. Many of the conflicts lead to anarchy on campuses, disorganization of the timing of school activities, destruction of lives and properties and in most cases, render school environments completely insecure for serious academic activities. In addition to these, many known school conflicts have resulted in protracted disharmony in school staff interpersonal relationships, increased indiscipline among students, disarmed school authorities, clogged channel of progressive communication and rendered institutions of learning ungovernable (Agbonna, 2016).

Furthermore, looking at the Nigerian higher education system, there have been cases of conflicts often resulting in industrial actions. The various unions in the federal universities, polytechnics and colleges of education are always in conflict with either the management or the federal government. For more than thirty years now, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Federal Government of Nigeria have been in industrial disharmony over the non-implementation of agreements reached by both parties (Umana, 2020). The agreements addressed issues of poor conditions of service of academic staff members in government-owned universities; problem of underfunding and infrastructural neglect in the universities; as well as lack of autonomy and academic freedom which ASUU claims, affect the quality of teaching, research and scholarship in the universities. These issues have featured prominently as the primary causes of conflicts between ASUU and the government. The nature and character of higher institutions as an academic organization entails the achievement and maintenance of a harmonious environment conducive for the working together of various groups of staff and the management team for the

attainment of preselected missions and objectives (Suleiman, 2020). However, in recent years, the industrial relations terrain in the Nigerian tertiary education system has been saturated with series of industrial conflicts with consequent adversities on the advancement of knowledge. The situation which leads to conflict could bring about both negative and positive outcomes.

The positive or negative impact of conflict on institutions would basically depend on how it is managed. A poorly managed conflict does not only affect the length of time students spend in higher institutions with attendant financial burden on parents, it also affects the image of the institutions within the global context. Unfortunately, it is unrealistic and impossible to completely eradicate conflict within the tertiary education system, especially where sabotage situations are common (Umana & Okafor, 2019), but the corollary is that no meaningful development can take place where a system is torn apart by conflicts. This brings about the need to properly manage conflicts in order to retain its positive aspect, improve job satisfaction and peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions. The effect and consequences of unmanaged conflicts in the workplace on employees and the organization are crucial. In order to manage or develop effective key conflict management strategies, it is essential to know the underlying causes. If the causes of conflict are known, a conflict chart which directs management processes can be developed. This can enable tertiary institution administrators to develop appropriate strategies towards managing such a conflict. Notwithstanding, the knowledge basis of the sources or causes of organizations' conflicts are minimal and this can be attributed to the low incidence of empirical research, especially in relation to Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Conflict management is a planned process required in an organization to arrive at a decision in an appropriate way of handling and resolving conflict in order to promote peaceful culture and build a platform upon which organizational goals could be attained. Management is a process of achieving organizational objectives, through the process of coordinating available resources via planning, organizing, controlling and leading human resources to effectively and efficiently pursue set goals in a peaceful and conducive atmosphere (Obizue, 2016). Mbah, Oluka and Alio (2021) stated that conflict management strategy is any approach, method or tactics adopted and applied by administrators in conflict situations with the intention to bring such situation to a peaceful end in order to achieve the stated objectives of an organization or unit. Onyali and Nnebedum (2018) stated that conflict management strategies are practices, mechanisms or techniques put in place by school principals to check the negative tendencies of conflict.

Conflict management strategies are necessary for the management of conflicts in any organization. For an organization to be effective and efficient in performing its activities, there is need for peaceful co-existence and understanding among members of the organization (Olaniyan, Oduguwa, Ojo & Oduguwa, 2020). Different conflict management strategies are suggested by different authors. Obizue and Ahukanna (2017) listed eight strategies such as; application of Grit theory, synergy, separation device, prayer device, tolerance and culture of civility, empathy device, effective catharsis, conflict resolution management and leadership style. Okafor (2016) listed

another eight techniques as follows: problem solving, super ordinate goals, avoidance, smoothing, compromising, authoritative command and altering the human variables. Other strategies mentioned by authors are suppression, third party interruption, cooperation, democratic process, job rotation and confrontation. Brigs (2017) added that strategies to conflict management are futuristic detailed approach that looks into achieving long term wins for the parties involved in conflict. Strategies include negotiation, collective bargaining, mediation, third party intervention, brainstorming and communication (Akintayo, 2018). This study focused on two strategies for conflict management specifically third party involvement and consultation.

Third party involvement in conflict management includes a scenario where management employs an external expert to tackle the issues on ground (Beryl, 2017). A third party is a person or entity that assists opposing parties in resolving their differences or controls the severity of their disagreements (Aremu, Adeyemi & Abog, 2021). A third party is defined as an actor that helps the conflict parties resolve the conflict or regulate the level of violence. The third party may be a consultant, counselor or a mediator, whose duty is to advise or instruct the disputing parties on how to settle their disputes or an arbitrator. When the degree of conflict is so severe that it becomes dysfunctional to the organization's survival, is impacting results and all efforts to resolve the conflict have failed, a third-party conflict management approach is normally used. Third-party conflict management strategy involves the use of a neutral third party to either help in the resolution of a dispute or to resolve the dispute. In this situation, management has an external consultant to solve the problem. The consultant can be a mediator, whose task is to give instruction to sides in conflict on how to solve the problem or an arbitrator, whose task is to impose a solution (Iyekekpolor, 2019).

Consultation conflict management strategy involves the process of negotiation, discussion and collaboration between disputing parties. Juchel in Igbinoba, Salau, Falola, Olokundun and Ogueyungbo (2019) stated that when conflicting parties jointly discuss the disputing issues openly, they arrive at a favourable solution because it is done with both parties being in a good state of mind. It is a problem solving strategy that involves integration of each party's interest. It is a win - win situation. Innovative ideas often emerge when people use the consultation approach for conflict management. This can be effective for complex scenarios when administrators of tertiary educational institutions need to find a novel solution. In consultation, when tertiary institution management gets information that academic staff are planning to have misunderstanding over certain issue, the management have to identify and discuss with those staff concerned. This could be done through an informant. This will help the management to find out the grievances and lasting solutions to their problems (Obi cited in Okwuchi, 2015). Consultation involves an attempt to work with the other party involved in the conflict to find a win-win solution to the problem in hand or at least to find a solution that most satisfies the concerns of both parties (Lundgren, 2016). The win-win approach sees conflict management as an opportunity to come to a mutually beneficial result; and it includes identifying the underlying concerns of the opponents and finding an alternative which meets each party's concerns.

Conflicts in tertiary educational institutions are rampant and ubiquitous. Know-how of conflict management is considered one of the important skills for administrators. The educational administrator may contribute, one way or the other, in planning, policy – making and programme designing, yet his major role rests with the effective and efficient implementation of such plans, policies and programmes for the benefit of education. Afariogun (2017) defined administration as a broad umbrella encompassing a number of processes such as: planning, coordinating, controlling and being involved in other management processes and contribute to formulation of policies. In order to achieve these goals, the heads of the educational organizations plan carefully various programmes and activities. Proper management of conflict is required to be established by school administrators in order to ensure the smooth running of the schools.

Respondent variables that can influence the extent of conflict management strategies adopted by institutional administrators for peaceful co-existence in this study are years of experience and type of institution. The knowledge, experience and expertise of administrators may determine the extent of adoption of conflict management strategies in tertiary educational institutions in South-South Nigeria. Administrators of tertiary educational institutions can be identified as Vice Chancellors, Rectors, Provosts, Deans of Faculties or schools, Directors and Heads of Departments. According to Owan (2018), the ability and credibility to manage and resolve conflicts in any school depends on the experience of the school administrators. In support of this, Khan, Atta and Gul (2020) stated that administrative experience plays a very dynamic role in developing effective conflict management skills and smooth running of schools.

Type of institution in this study means all conventional tertiary institutions- federal universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. Fareo and Jajua (2018) reported that there are changes in the views of academic staff and management of universities, polytechnics and colleges of education on the causes of conflict and conflict management strategies in tertiary institutions. The university, polytechnic and college systems comprise a variety of communities based on a wide range of academic disciplines and functions. The institutions' internal behaviours constitute a very complex organism shaped by many hands. This implies that, internally the university, polytechnic or college life is shaped by many logic, habits and dynamics. It is also influenced by various challenges, constraints and pressures from the outer environment. Therefore, it will be difficult for higher institutions to attain academic efficiency in an environment that is crisis ridden as witnessed in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. When there is peaceful co-existence in the schools, higher productivity will be enhanced and the administrations will be in a better position to carry out their responsibilities without bitterness.

Peace culture is one of the major factors that catalyse the sustainability of any institution of higher learning. Lack of peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions 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. The 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). However, a higher education environment that is peaceful will facilitate cross fertilization of ideas, skills, knowledge creation and dissemination. This is so because academic activities would go on undisrupted. Therefore, this study assessed the conflict management strategies adopted by administrators of tertiary institutions for peaceful co-existence in South-South Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Conflicts have made management of educational institutions in Nigeria to be the spotlight throughout the country. It has been observed that tertiary institutions have for decades been faced with so many crises ranging from conflict between academic staff and administrators, students versus academic staff, students versus higher institution authorities, and non-academic staff versus administrators among others. 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. These conflicts may have had effects on the work effectiveness of tertiary education staff resulting in low morale, inaction, frustration, lack of commitment and low productivity.

The incessant conflicts resulting in strikes and closure of institutions revolve round the non-implementation of agreements between the institution staff and the federal government. Incessant strikes by tertiary education sector unions, which lead to closure of institutions for long periods is a major challenge requiring appropriate solution. Such periodic and prolonged disruptions of academic calendar impacts negatively on the extent and quality of knowledge acquired by the students leading to poor academic performance and ultimately on the potentials of tertiary education to add remarkable, if not tremendous value to national development. The effect of strikes on the part of lecturers causes brain drain which poses a significant challenge in personnel management in Nigerian universities. This constant loss of experienced staff members hampers institutional memory and continuity. It also results in a shortage of qualified personnel, leading to an increased workload for those who remain, further affecting their motivation and job satisfaction.

Furthermore, differences in opinions and interests of the individual groups in tertiary institutions may constitute conflict between staff and management, as well as students and school authorities, hence management and personnel in institutions of higher learning sometimes engage themselves in conflict situations which result into strikes, thereby affecting university administration and consequently reducing productivity. Despite this situation, stakeholders in education seem to develop non-challant attitude towards these conflicts. Also, educational administrators seem not to be proactive to the threat posed by conflicts in higher institutions, which might endanger the progress and development of the institutions if not properly managed.

As a result of mismanagement of conflict and weak school-based security mechanisms, many mild school conflicts have turned violent and some become unresolved in Nigerian higher institutions. These activities have culminated into truncated academic programmes leading to elongated education calendars. This also creates an environment of tension and instability, affecting the overall reputation and credibility of the institution. Conflict has gradually become an unavoidable situation in every institution including tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria. In view of the unavoidable nature of conflicts in tertiary institutions, there is therefore the need to assess the level conflict management strategies are adopted by administrators of tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria for peaceful co-existence.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to ascertain the extent conflict management strategies are adopted by administrators for peaceful coexistence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria. Specifically, the study assessed the extent:

1. Third party involvement conflict management strategy is adopted by administrators for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions.
2. Consultation conflict management strategy is adopted by administrators for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent is third party involvement conflict management strategy adopted by administrators for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria?
2. To what extent is consultation conflict management strategy adopted by administrators for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Respondents do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent third party involvement conflict management strategy is adopted for peaceful co-existence in federal tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria based on years of experience (below 5 years, 5-10 years, above 10 years).

2. Administrators of universities, polytechnics and colleges of education do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent they adopt third party involvement conflict management strategy for peaceful co-existence in federal tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria.
3. Respondents do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent consultation conflict management strategy is adopted for peaceful co-existence in federal tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria based on years of experience (below 5 years, 5-10 years, above 10 years).
4. Administrators of universities, polytechnics and colleges of education do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent they adopt consultation conflict management strategy for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria.

Method

Descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study. The study was conducted in South-South Nigeria. South South Nigeria is the one of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria representing both geographic and political region of the country's eastern coast. The population of the study consisted of 1,598 administrators in all the 18 federal tertiary educational institutions (eight federal universities, seven federal polytechnics and three federal colleges of education) in South-South Nigeria. A sample size of 320 administrators was used for the study. The sample size was derived using the Taro Yamani formula. Thereafter, stratified random sampling technique was used to draw the sample. Data for this study were collected using a self-structured questionnaire titled "Conflict Management Strategies in Tertiary Educational Institutions (CMSTEI)".

The instrument was developed by the researcher based on the insight gained from literature review and the research questions guiding the study. The questionnaire was made up of two sections - A and B. Section A contained two items on the type of institution and years of experience, while Section B consisted of two clusters in line with the research questions. Items 1-9 were used to gather data on third party involvement strategy and items 10-19 were used to elicit data on consultation strategy. The respondents were requested to rate the items on a 5-point rating scale of Very Great Extent (VGE), Great Extent (GE), Moderate Extent (ME), Small Extent (SE) and Very Small Extent (VSE) with values 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. Three experts in the field validated the instrument. To ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument, the researcher conducted a trial test whereby 20 copies of the instrument were administered to 20 stores officers from public tertiary institutions (federal universities, polytechnics and colleges of education) in Anambra State who were not part of the population of the study. Data collected were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha and reliability coefficient values of 0.81 and 0.80 were obtained for the two clusters with an overall reliability coefficient value of 0.805.

The researcher personally administered 320 copies of the instrument to the respondents in their institutions with the help of five research assistants who were briefed on what to do. Out of the 320 copies of the questionnaire administered, fourteen were incompletely filled and thirteen were not returned, hence twenty two copies of the questionnaire were not utilized. Thus, 293 copies of the questionnaire represented 91.56% return rate were used for data analysis.Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze data to answer the research questions and determine the closeness or otherwise of the responses of the respondents. One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Where the calculated p-value is less than the stipulated level of significance 0.05 ($p < 0.05$), it implied that there was a significant difference between respondents' mean scores and the null hypothesis was rejected. On the other hand, if the p-value was greater than or equal to the alpha level of 0.05 ($p \geq 0.05$), it meant that there was no significant difference in the respondents mean scores and was not rejected.

Results

Research Question 1

To what extent is third party involvement conflict management strategy adopted by administrators for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria?

Table 1

Mean ratings of administrators on extent of adoption of third party involvement conflict management strategy for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions N = 293

S/No	Third party involvement strategy	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	**Management employs mediators to help conflicting parties resolve disputes.**	2.35	0.61	Small extent
2.	**Arbitrators are used to make binding decisions when conflicts cannot be resolved internally.**	3.42	0.58	Moderate extent
3.	**Conciliators are involved to facilitate communication between disputing parties.**	2.56	0.54	Moderate extent
4.	**Consultants with conflict management expertise are engaged to guide parties towards a resolution.**	2.45	0.57	Small extent

5. Third-party involvement is used when internal conflict resolution attempts have failed.	2.63	0.59	Moderate extent
6. Mediators help disputing parties maintain control over the resolution process.	2.48	0.55	Small extent
7. Arbitration ensures conflicts are resolved in a binding manner when mediation fails.	2.56	0.52	Moderate extent
8. Conciliators act as neutral communication conduits without taking sides.	3.70	0.50	Great extent
9. Consultants help parties build long-term understanding and collaboration beyond the immediate conflict.	2.94	0.75	Moderate extent
Cluster Mean	**2.79**		**Moderate extent**

As displayed in Table 1, the cluster mean of 2.79 shows that the third party involvement conflict management strategy is adopted to a moderate extent by administrators for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria. The item-by-item analysis shows that item 8 with a mean score of 3.70 is an aspect of third party involvement strategy adopted to a great extent for peaceful co-existence, while items 2, 3, 5, 7 and 9 with mean scores of 3.42, 2.56, 2.63, 2.56 and 2.04 respectively are aspects of third party involvement strategy adopted to a moderate extent by administrators for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions. Items 1, 4 and 6 with mean scores of 2.35, 2.45 and 2.48 are aspects of third party involvement strategy adopted to a small extent by administrators for peaceful co-existence. The standard deviations of 0.50 to 0.75 are within the same range, showing homogeneity in responses.

Research Question 2

To what extent is consultation conflict management strategy adopted by administrators for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria?

Table 2

Mean ratings of administrators on extent of adoption of consultation conflict management strategy for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions N = 293

S/No	Consultation strategy	Mean	SD	Decision
10.	**Management engages staff in open discussions to identify grievances before conflicts escalate.**	2.94	0.75	Moderate extent
11.	**Consultation allows both parties in conflict to participate in problem-solving and arrive at a mutually acceptable solution.**	2.74	0.67	Moderate extent
12.	**Management collaborates with staff and students to discuss service inadequacies affecting peaceful co-existence.**	2.91	0.74	Moderate extent
13.	**Consultation promotes assertiveness and cooperation among all parties involved in the conflict.**	3.72	0.53	Great extent
14.	**The win-win approach in consultation ensures that each party feels valued and part of the resolution process.**	3.02	0.87	Moderate extent
15.	**Consultation encourages open communication, reducing misperceptions and fostering trust among conflicting parties.**	2.98	0.81	Moderate extent
16.	**Solutions reached through consultation are generally binding because all parties are involved in the process.**	3.70	0.52	Great extent
17.	**The consultation strategy requires significant time and effort to achieve effective conflict resolution.**	3.58	0.56	Great extent
18.	**Consultation is most effective in conflicts where long-term relationships and collaboration are important.**	3.74	0.59	Great extent
19.	**Administrators using consultation guide parties through problem-solving procedures and encourage consensus.**	3.70	0.59	Great extent
	Cluster Mean	**3.30**		**Moderate extent**

In Table 2, the clusters mean of 3.30 shows that administrators adopt consultation conflict management strategy to a moderate extent for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria. The item-by-item analysis shows that items 13, 16, 17, 18 and 19 with mean scores of 3.72, 3.70, 3.58, 3.74 and 3.70 respectively are aspects of consultation conflict management strategy adopted to a great extent for peaceful co-existence, while items 10, 11, 12, 14 and 15 with mean scores of 2.94, 2.74, 2.91, 3.02 and 2.98 respectively are aspects of consultation strategy adopted for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions. The standard deviations for all items are within the same range showing that there is homogeneity amongst responses indicating a greater consensus of opinion.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

Respondents do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent third party involvement conflict management strategy is adopted for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria based on years of experience (below 5 years, 5-10 years, above 10 years).

Table 3

ANOVA Summary on the extent of adoption of third party involvement conflict management strategy by administrators for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions

Source of Variance	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	P-value	Decision
Between Groups	1.496	2	.748	.188	.829	Not Sig
Within Groups	1156.695	290	3.989			
Total	1158.191	292				

Table 3 shows that at 290 degree of freedom, experience does not significantly influence the mean ratings of the respondents on the extent of adoption of third party involvement conflict

management for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria. F-ratio is .188 and P-value (.829) which is greater than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance (P-value > alpha level). Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

Hypothesis 2

Administrators of universities, polytechnics and colleges of education do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent they adopt third party involvement conflict management strategy for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria.

Table 4

ANOVA Summary on the extent administrators of universities, polytechnics and colleges of education adopt third party involvement conflict management for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions

Source of Variance	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	P-value	Decision
Between Groups	11.061	2	5.530	1.398	.249	Not Sig
Within Groups	1147.131	290	3.956			
Total	1158.191	292				

Table 4 shows that at 290 degree of freedom, type of institution (universities, polytechnics and colleges of education) does not significantly influence the mean ratings of administrators in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria on the extent of adoption of third party involvement conflict management strategy for peaceful co-existence. F-ratio is 1.398 and P-value (.249) which is greater than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance (P-value > alpha level). The null hypothesis of no significant difference among the groups is therefore accepted.

Hypothesis 3

Respondents do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent consultation conflict management strategy is adopted for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria based on years of experience (below 5 years, 5-10 years, above 10 years).

Table 5

ANOVA Summary on the extent of adoption of consultation conflict management strategy by administrators for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions

Source of Variance	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	P-value	Decision
Between Groups	12.620	2	6.310	.593	.553	Not Sig
Within Groups	3087.161	290	10.645			
Total	3099.782	292				

Table 5 shows that at 290 degree of freedom, experience does not significantly influence the mean ratings of the respondents on the extent of adoption of consultation strategy for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria. F-ratio is .593 and P-value (.553) which is greater than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance (P-value > alpha level). Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

Hypothesis 4

Administrators of universities, polytechnics and colleges of education do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent they adopt consultation conflict management strategy for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria.

Table 6

ANOVA Summary on the extent administrators of universities, polytechnics and colleges of education adopt consultation for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions

Source of Variance	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	P-value	Decision
Between Groups	3.184	2	1.592	.149	.862	Not Sig
Within Groups	3096.598	290	10.678			
Total	3099.782	292				

Table 6 shows that at 290 degree of freedom, type of institution (universities, polytechnics and colleges of education) does not significantly influence the mean ratings of administrators in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria on the extent of adoption of consultation strategy for peaceful co-existence. F-ratio is .149 and P-value (.862) which is greater than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance (P-value > alpha level). Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

Discussion

The findings of the study indicated that administrators adopted third party involvement strategy to a moderate extent for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria. Among the strategies adopted by administrators were conciliators acting as neutral communication conduits without taking sides to a great extent. Making binding decisions when conflicts cannot be resolved internally, involving conciliators to facilitate communication between disputing parties, using it when internal conflict resolution attempts to have failed, ensuring conflicts are resolved in a binding manner when mediation fails and helps parties build long-term understanding and collaboration beyond the immediate conflict to a moderate extent. This suggests that while administrators recognize the value of neutral third-party facilitation in conflict resolution, its practical application is inconsistent.

The moderate adoption aligns with Rahim (2015), who posited that third-party intervention is effective in maintaining impartiality and ensuring long-term collaboration, but may not always be employed due to institutional limitations or lack of trained mediators. The findings are also in

consonance with that of Aremu, Adeyemi and Abogunrin (2021) and Obizue, Chukwudebelu and Onuoha (2020) who stated that effective management of conflicts in schools is largely dependent on the cordiality and cooperation among the various stakeholders, which must be prompted by effective conflict management strategies by school administrators. This strategy gives room for the parties involved in conflicts to express their grievances and suggest ways to resolve the conflicts. Administrators adopt third party strategy when all attempts to solve conflicts internally have failed. Since they are responsible for the performance of the organization, they involve third parties before the conflicts escalate to the point where organizational performance is affected.

Testing of the first and second hypotheses revealed that experience did not significantly influence the mean ratings of the respondents on their extent of adoption of third party involvement strategy for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria. Also, type of institution (universities, polytechnics and colleges of education) did not significantly influence the mean ratings of administrators in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria on the extent of adoption of third party involvement strategy for peaceful co-existence. It followed therefore, that the null hypotheses were accepted. This implies a consensus among administrators regardless of level of experience or institutional affiliation, supporting the view that third-party involvement is seen as a generally applicable but moderately implemented strategy. The findings agreed with that of Obizue, Chukwudebelu and Onuoha (2020) who found no significant difference. However, the findings disagreed with the findings of Mojisola (2021) and Aremu, Adeyemi and Abogunrin (2021) which found a significant difference.

The findings of the study revealed that administrators adopted consultation conflict management strategy to a moderate extent for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria. This indicated that consultation is valued as a participatory approach that encourages dialogue and consensus-building. This implies that majority of Administrators promotes assertiveness and cooperation among all parties involved in the conflict, solutions reached through consultation are generally binding because all parties are involved in the process and using it to guide parties through problem-solving procedures to encourage consensus to a great extent. Administrators also engaged staff in open discussions to identify grievances before conflicts escalate, allow both parties in conflict to participate in problem-solving and arrive at a mutually acceptable solution to a moderate extent. In support of this, Ajilore and Akpoveta (2019), Adeyemi and Ibrahim (2019) and Arop and Bassey (2017) asserted that consultation involves finding a solution to conflicting situations that satisfy both parties. In this strategy, individuals seem to be just as concerned with the wants of others as their own. However, they are not willing to give up their own positions to merely soothe the wants of other individuals. Innovative ideas often emerge when people use the consultation approach to conflict management.

The test of the third and fourth hypotheses indicated that experience did not significantly influence the mean ratings of the respondents on the extent of adoption of consultation strategy for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria. Also, type of institution (universities, polytechnics and colleges of education) did not significantly influence the mean ratings of

administrators in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria on the extent of adoption of consultation strategy for peaceful co-existence. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference was accepted. This suggests that the perception and practice of consultation are consistent across administrators in South-South tertiary institutions. The findings disagreed with that of Adeyemi and Ibrahim (2019) which found a significant difference

Conclusion

Conflict management is an important aspect of school administration that must be tactically handled if educational objectives must be achieved. However, this study found that some administrators in tertiary institutions adopt this conflict management strategy to a great extent for peaceful co-existence, some adopt it moderately, while others adopt it to a small extent for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria. This implies that these conflict management strategies are not greatly adopted for peaceful co-existence in tertiary institutions. Adoption of third party involvement and consultation strategies by administrators ensures a conducive atmosphere for teaching and learning. If the administrators are effective in handling conflicts and disputes among the students, staff and community, there will be a free and serene environment for teaching and learning.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher proffers the following recommendations:

1. Tertiary institutions managements should organize conferences, workshops and seminars to create awareness on the negative effects of conflicts in the institutions on both staff and students. This will encourage peaceful co-existence and team spirit for the smooth running of the institutions
2. Tertiary institution managements should establish Conflict Management Committees that would assist in identifying conflict management strategies to help tackle conflicts between academic and non-academic staff, and+ promote peaceful co-existence and teamwork among them for effective and efficient achievement of the institutions goals.
3. Tertiary institution management should provide communication and participatory framework through which both academic and non-academic staff will have opportunities and freedom to express their views, opinions and participate in any kind of administrative decision making.
4. Capacity building in the area of peace education should be organized by the institutions. This will help to equip lecturers and school administrators with theoretical, practical knowledge and skills on issues relating to peace and how to use it as a strategy for conflict management.

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