

Percieved Factors of Conflict and Effective Use of Language and Communication for Conflict Resolution among University Students

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Abstract: *Over the past decade, conflict has emerged as one of the challenges that Nigerian universities societies encounter. It has been proved by past studies that conflict destroys and ends up in disaster. It is against this background that the study investigated the causes of conflict and the use of language and communication for its resolution among the university students. A descriptive survey was employed for the study. Two universities were selected randomly from the nine universities in Ogun State, Nigeria: Olabisi Onabanjo University and Tai Solarin University of Education respectively. A self structured questionnaire was used to generate data from 200 students out of which 171 were returned for data analysis. Descriptive statistics was used to answer the two research questions and t-test was used to test the stated hypothesis. The result identified a lot of factors such as overcrowding in the halls of residence ,unresolved disagreement and personality clashes among others were some of the causes of conflicts among Nigerian university students. The result revealed a no significant relationship in the perception of male and female on the use of language and communication in resolving conflicts. The study concludes that the use of effective language and communication is germane to good relationship in an organization such as universities. The study therefore recommends amongst others the use of dialogue in resolving conflicts should be embraced and, a conducive environment should be provided for the students.*

Keywords: *Conflict Resolution, Communication, Disruption, Language, Perceived Factors.*

I. Introduction

Nigeria, according to Salawu (2010) and Ethnologue, (2005), is the most populous country in Africa with a population of over 120 million people. This probably informs Nigerian government in establishing higher institutions of learning in nearly every village so that Nigerian children would have access to higher education which will eventually equip them with academic power to live independently without being a liability to the society. Supporting this, Aluede, O., Jimoh, B., Agwinede, B. O. and Omoregie, E. (2005), and National Policy on Education (2004) affirm that tertiary institutions are established in Nigeria to equip students with sound and qualitative education that would make them to be productive, self-fulfilled, self-reliant and self-actualized. This is always enhanced by coming together attending classes as an organization to construct, maintain and change the social world they belong to, for better.

However, the uniqueness of human beings as a result of individual differences such as home background, religious affiliations, and economic status always bring about disagreement which if not handled on time, may lead to argument, discord, friction and strife that may result to conflict. Conflict is not a new phenomenon in human community, neither is it limited to one-one relationship. It involves relationship between and among groups, societies, organizations and nation-states.

Studies carried out by eminent scholars on conflicts and conflict related issues establish that conflict is a struggle over values, claims to scarce status, power and resources, in which the individuals involved try to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. Supporting this, Francis (2007), states that conflict is an inevitable of co-habitation or co-existence of individuals or people in society, struggling for limited values or resources as against countless desires. Throwing more light into this, Joseph (2012), notes that the existence of scarce resources in societies often generates to fights over distribution of these resources, and the fact that different groups in the social systems pursue different goals, they often had to vie with one another, and results into conflict. Conflict in the words of Obegi, and Nyamboga, (2008), is beyond contention but rather more of opposition, commotion and disagreement over an issue. According to them, conflict is a situation where two persons or groups wish to carry out acts which are mutually incompatible, a premise of pushing and pulling, giving and taking process of finding the balance between the two.

Robins (2001), however views conflict to be the pursuit of incompatible interest and goals by different people. By implication, human beings have different goals, aims, desires and objectives. In other words, human desires differ and when they are not met as planned, there may be struggle between the concerned parties which may eventually bring about conflict. Conflict when not resolved, usually results into disruption academic programmes, destruction of properties as well as loss of lives in the university communities and environments.

While conflict seems to be more of violent in nature, yet it is interesting to note that it is synonymous with progress, a rain of blessing and essential ingredients of progress in human relationship. No wonder then that, Okotoni & Okotoni (2003) see conflict as a contributive factor for the maintenance, adjustment and adaptation of a social relationship and social structures of which its absence in human society would be unbelievable, boring and, a strong indication that conflicts are being suppressed.

Conflict cannot be eliminated in human environment in it man grows to learn accommodate and adjust to the society he belongs. In line with this, Owolabi, Binuyo and Oduyoye (2012) affirm conflict to be an instrument of value bringing about character and attitudinal change which ranks important in its ability to reshape human potentials for desired development.

There are a number of factors that may lead to conflict among students in higher institutions. Prevalent among them is the lack of accommodation in the school premises. This renders some students to live in clusters outside the campuses and this breeds unhealthy attitude such smoking, drinking, womanizing and involvement in cultism that may lead to strain relationship. In his observation, Edukugho (2006) expresses that 80% of university students' population in Nigeria live outside the campus with many becoming victims of hostile communities, and many be in regular clashes with host indigenes. Those claiming living in the campuses are not spared of embarrassment of many kinds. Corroborating this, Idachaba (2007), argues that overpopulation of students in Nigerian universities results in shortage of accommodation and many students live in over-crowded rooms. In addition to this, Namande (2008) asserts that dissatisfaction such as struggles for resources, egocentrism, ethnocentrism and struggle for recognition lead to conflicts among university students. Also of relevance is, what Gisesa (2008) views as deficiency of information. This may lead to misinformation, wrong information and missing information. Information is very vital in human relationship as lack of information can result rumours and fake news that can set a society ablaze.

In whichever angle conflict is being viewed, one thing that is certain is that human beings are social animals dependent on one another for survival; an implication of finding last solution to whatever rivalry that may debar the central from being held together; realizing that unchecked conflict can result to violence; an ill wind that blows nobody any good, therefore, the relevance of language and communication cannot be ignored in conflict resolution.

II. Language And Communication

It is unrealistic to think of eliminating conflicts completely with human vicinities, realizing that conflicts have both positive and negative dimensions. In that wise, university authorities and all educational stakeholders are to find some ways of managing them from becoming a disaster in the society.

A pool of literature on conflict resolution recommends a number of dimensions that can aid effective conflict management. One of the dimensions is effective use of language and communication. Language, an arbitrary system of conventional vocal symbols is an essential tool with which human beings relate and interact with one another. Through the effective use of language and communication, humans express their views, feelings, emotion and make their requests and desires attended to, especially when the interlocutors understand one another. Babajide (2000:1) sees language as "the major distinguishing phenomenon between man and other creatures". This is because man is the only creature that has been endowed with the gift of using words intentionally and in a fashion peculiar to him alone. Language according to Adefila (2008) is an arbitrary system of conventional vocal symbols with which human beings interact and communicate. Language is an essential quality of human beings as it is a mutually accepted and recognized sign used to convey information as well as to express attitudes and reaction (Dairo 1998). Language and communication had been emphasized as one of the ways in which conflict can be resolved. Examples abound of kings religious leaders and eminent personalities in the in the society in the olden days ironing out issues that could have caused commotion in their societies with just a little talk. Mere words, that language produces according to (Adedimeji, 2004b:2), can make and prevent wars, create understanding or inflame prejudice, form constitutions or destroy them, sell shoddy or superior ideas, justify man's worst actions or express his highest ideals.

However, communication will only take place when those involved understand one another. Sharon (2003), states that effective communication means that all participants in the communication comprehend and understand the content of communication. Understanding the content of communication will only be possible when the interlocutors speak the same language. Language use can perform transactional and interactional functions. Whereas transactional function of language is more of veto power, the interactional function helps in establishing and sustaining social relationships. However, language has to be applied correctly for the

interlocutors to understand. By implication, each party in the process of communication must speak the same language. Elaborating on this, Orjime (2002: 56) observes that ‘the misapplication of language brings about disharmony and confrontation but when language is carefully and democratically used, it brings about co-operation.’ By implication, choice of words matters a lot in communication as the message wrongly passed can be misinterpreted and lead to war that can claim lives.

Statement of Problem

A number of factors can trigger conflicts among Nigerian students. This may not be unconnected with the fact that most Nigerian University students stay outside the campus while others who opted and have opportunity to live in the campus also live in a cluster within the same vicinity. The kind of behavior exhibited by some of these students maybe socially unacceptable, thus, triggering conflicts among them. Sometimes, conflicts arising among the students on and around the campus may extend to the host communities, thus making it difficult to control. This paper therefore examined the major causes of conflicts among the university students in Nigeria and the use of Language and Communication as management strategies of resolving them.

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the likely causes of conflicts among university students?
2. Can Language and communication be used as management strategies for conflict resolution?

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female university students on the effective use of language and communication in resolving conflict.

Methodology

Design: The study is a descriptive survey design investigating the perceived factors of conflict as well as the use of language and communication to resolve conflict among selected university students in Ogun State.

Participants

The target population of the study consisted of all the nine universities in Ogun State. Random sampling by balloting was used in selecting two universities; Olabisi Onabanjo University and Tai Solarin of Education. A sample of 200 students, were selected, from four hundred level of each of the two universities to participate in the study. The researchers intentionally made choice of the level because, it is believed that students at this level had stayed long in the university and would have had enough experiences to fill the questionnaire to bring originality into the work.

Instrument and Procedure of Administration

A structured questionnaire designed by the researchers was used to collect data on the university students’ demography, and their perceived factors of conflicts and method of conflict resolution. The instrument was administered on 200 respondents from Olabisi Onabanjo University and Tai Solarin University of Education respectively, who filled and returned the questionnaires to the researchers at their convenience. Only 171 were returned to the researchers for analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics - frequency and percentage were used to answer the two research questions posed by this study, while an independent t-test was used to test for differences between the use of language and communication as management strategies of conflict resolution among male and female university students.

III. Results

Research Question 1: What are the likely causes of conflicts among university students?

Table 1: A Descriptive Statistics of Factors of roommate Conflicts among University Students

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Percent (%)	
				YES	NO
Envious of other student brilliancy	171	1.3860	.48825	61.4%	38.6%
Envious of other students' Affluences	169	1.3964	.49061	59.6%	39.2%
Tribal discrimination	171	1.4971	.50146	50.3%	49.7%
Hoarding of useful information from other students	171	1.3450	.48896	64.3%	35.1%
Overpopulation in the hall of residence	171	1.3041	.46137	69.6%	30.4%
Forming cliques/factions	171	1.3275	.49504	64.9%	33.9%
Spreading rumours that is incriminating	171	1.3392	.47482	66.1%	33.9%
Intolerance to other students	170	1.3294	.48378	65.9%	33.5%

Fowl languages - insulting others	171	1.2632	.44164	73.7%	26.3%
Misinterpretation of information	171	1.3216	.48087	66.7%	32.7%
Ego problem	171	1.2807	.46353	70.8%	28.7%
Unresolved disagreement	171	1.2398	.44172	74.9%	24.6%
personality clashes	171	1.2281	.44791	74.9%	24.0%

Table 1 describes the perception of university students on factors of interpersonal conflicts among them and consequently answered the first research question. The table shows that unresolved disagreement and personality clashes (74.9% each) were rated higher than other factors, followed by the use of fowl languages (73.7%) and ego problem (70.80%) this result implies that these two factors are the major causes of conflict among the university students in Nigeria. Cultural differences was the lowest rated (50.3%) in other words, this factor is the least that can cause conflict among students.

Research Question 2: Can Language and communication be used as management strategies for conflict resolution?

Table 2: A Descriptive Statistics of Methods of Conflict Resolution Employ by University Students

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Percent (%)	
				YES	NO
Identifying source of conflict	171	1.0760	0.28709	91.2%	8.2%
Willingness to talk about issues	171	1.0643	.24606	93.6%	6.4%
Each party's willingness to accept responsibility	171	1.1404	.34837	86.0%	14.0%
Talking about both party's perception of the issue	171	1.1696	.39169	81.9%	17.5%
Clarifying issues	171	1.0994	.30010	90.1%	9.9%
Replacing "blaming" with personal responsibility	171	1.3216	.50474	64.3%	33.9%
Students' ability to communicate with one another will bring cooperation among them	171	1.2281	.44791	74.9%	24.0%
Fair hearing to the warring parties by their mediator	171	1.1520	.42041	80.1%	17.5%
Conducive environment	171	1.1754	.38146	82.5%	17.5%
Unbiased mediator	171	1.1579	.39658	81.9%	17.0%

The items on Table 2 above describe the use of Language and communication to resolve conflict among university students. Willingness to talk about the issues (93.6%) was rated highest followed by identifying source of conflict (91.2%) and clarifying issue (90.1%).

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female university students on the effective use of language and communication in resolving conflict.

Table3: Independent Samples Test of the Differences in the Male and Female University Students Perception of the effective use of language and communication to solve conflicts

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	Std. Error Diff	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Factor of conflict	Equal variances assumed	.872	.352	-1.144	166	.254	-.10490	.09169	Lower	Upper
		Equal variances not assumed			-1.142	160.44	.255	-.10490	.09182	-.28624

Table 3 shows the result of an independent sample test that shows the comparison between males and females university students' perception of effective use of language and communication to solve conflicts. The result of this finding shows no significant difference between the perception of males and females students on effective use of language and communication to solve conflicts $t(166) = -1.2, p = 0.25$.

IV. Discussion Of Finding

The first research question was on the causes of conflicts among university students. Result derived from the questionnaire indicated that personality clashes, unresolved disagreement, overpopulation in the halls of residence and misinterpretation of information are some of the identified factors that are responsible for conflicts among the undergraduate students. About 75% of the sampled students signified that they face a lot of challenges conflict wise. The study acknowledges the fact that conflict must be present as long as human beings

live together irrespective of their social, religious, ethnic or educational background. This view validates several other views expressed by Okotoni and Okotoni (2003), Scott (2003) and Ebele, (2009). While Okotoni & Okotoni note conflict to be inevitable in human society as it has become part and parcel of human organization globally, Scott (2003) and Ebele (2009) submit that conflict is a part of every human organization as a result of the individual differences in humanity.

The second research question on whether language and communication can be relevant in resolving conflict. The fact the conflict live with man, calls for finding ways and means to manage it so it won't degenerate to war. The findings from the respondents indicate that willingness to talk about the issues, identifying source of conflict, clarifying issues and fair hearing from the warring party by the mediator will do a lot in resolving conflict. This is in corroboration with Dairo (1998) who emphasizes language to be a fulcrum for human communication and interaction. Language promotes inter and intra ethnic clashes and removes all forms of suspicion that can lead to unnecessary embarrassment.

Weliness to talk about issues would assist in identifying what the issues are, and a lot clarification can be done through the effective use of language. However the mediators should be very careful in the choice of words that both parties understand. Further, the study found the wiliness to talk to have been the highest contributor to the resolution of conflicts. This study was also able to establish the fact there is no difference in the ways language and communication is used to resolve conflicts among males and females, although it is believed that women communicate on a more emotional level than men.

V. Conclusion And Recommendations

It has been demonstrated in this study that conflicts are potential issues and inherent in human. It was also observed that conflict itself is not bad and when handled amicably, can build a strong relationship in the society. The study was able to identify some of the factors that may bring conflict among undergraduate students in Nigeria. Some of the causes mentioned are forming of cliques/factions, spreading rumours that is incriminating, ego problem, among others. The study also revealed that effective use of language and communication can resolve conflict and bring sanity to a warring society of higher institutions in Nigeria. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for better management of and peaceful living in Nigerian higher institutions of learning.

1. There is the need for the education stakeholders deliberating on the issues that can cause conflict among university students.
2. The university authority should create a functional and effective platform where students' grievances can be listened to, and discussed before they degenerate to conflicts.
3. Provision of good accommodation for students must be part of vital financial budget of every university.
4. There must be free flow of communication from the school authority to the students.
5. Student representatives must be part of committee taking vital decisions that affect the students.

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