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STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION: ACCOMMODATION, COMPROMISE, AND COMPETITION IN IMPROVING UNIVERSITY DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined strategies for conflict resolution using accommodation, compromise, and competition in improving university development in south-south Nigeria. Three objectives, three research questions and three corresponding hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The study adopted a descriptive and correlational design. The population of this study comprised all the staff (management, academic, Non-teaching (registry and bursary staff), in the twenty (20) public universities (7 federal and 13 state) in South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. A sample of 900 respondents (comprising 180 management staff, 300 registry staff, and 420 academic staff) were selected in a five-phased multistage sampling technique in twelve (12) public universities in 6 cluster classification (Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers) in South-South of Nigeria. Three (3) experts validated self-structured instrument titled “Strategies for Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (SCRQ)” with a reliability coefficient of .921. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation (with a criterion mean cut off of 2.50) to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The study revealed that accommodation, compromise, and competition strategies as method for conflict management resolution have significant relationships with university development in the south-south of Nigeria. The study recommends amongst others that Universities are encouraged to adopt dispute resolution strategies such as accommodation, compromise and collective bargaining to improve working relationship that would enhance university development.

Keywords: Strategies, Conflict Resolution, Accommodation, Compromise, Competition, University Development, South-South, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Conflict, as is often said, is an integral part of human existence alongside, an inevitable friction that could occur in any organization (like university) due to the existence of different unharmonious interests, disenchantments, friction and incompatible goals among university stakeholders (such as management, staff, students and vendors) that could affect its structure and operation (Osadeke et al., 2018). The possibility of disenchantments, disillusionment, could arising from frictions or conflicts in universities could dwarf the smooth conduct of academic, social and research activities in any citadel of learning. This justifies the inception of mechanisms, strategies and procedures for managing conflicts that may inevitably arise as a result of persons or staff from different environmental, educational, social, racial, religious and cultural backgrounds and leanings that have to be sacrificed, tailored or refined under the alter of adjusting to work conditions, ethics and regulations.

Consequently, the implication of the inevitability of conflicts in universities is that it enables management to avail themselves of ample time and opportunity to appraise the causative factors including considering all possible scenarios and internal dynamics prior to effectively resolving the conflicts, thereby, situating the university in the pact of positive operation, proactive leadership and resolution of conflicting issues. Hence, what is paramount that would eventually make the difference is how the varying conflicts that exist in a university is strategically managed based on the norms and contemporary dynamics. Thus, university administrators must treat conflict management issues with utmost importance because it is perhaps the most powerful tool for bringing about positive changes in organizations.

In addition the integration of strategic conflict resolution and management stems on appropriately diagnosing or identifying the underlying systems, processes and approaches that would suffice as effective interventions instituted to positively handle or resolve conflicts in universities (Aadaeze, 2014). Thus, this implies that at the occurrence of conflict in any university, it becomes imperative to initiate positive resolution strategies that will specifically identify internal dynamics, undercurrents and local causative factors triggering the conflicts in that particular university. This approach would lead to jettisoning negative conflict resolution strategies that abhors intervention meetings with contending persons in the guise of covering and containing skirmishes or conflicts that could degenerate to future litigations that is antithetical to the effective operation and sustainable development in universities.

Instructively, educational bodies (such as schools and especially universities) are accountable for their operational modalities, required inputs and management strategies for resolving conflicts that positively relates to organizational behaviours, performance and productivity of systems and processes in universities. Alluding to this, Adeyemi and Ademila (2015) emphasized that the adoption of certain conflict management strategies (notably; accommodation, compromise and competing), which avails and suffices as a pathway towards attaining administrative effectiveness, efficiencies, optimal performance and goal attainment in Nigeria universities. This standpoint implies that the type of conflict management strategy integrated in a university could enhance their capacity to introduce a number of positive, proactive and preventive conflict handling measures that would enable all individuals or parties that are susceptible to be involved in conflict to rather harmoniously work together in the university system and community in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the influx of humans across different demographic characteristics (education, age, gender, religion, marital status, etc.) in formal organizations could prompt or

erupt the existence of multidimensional quests, goals and multicultural activities, aspects and interactions likely to promote or threaten the enthronelement of harmonious work environment and attainment of organizational goals especially in universities in the 21st century. In line with this, Olajide (2014) emphasized that tertiary institutions (especially universities) in Nigeria, are inundated with ever-increasing conflict that constitutes a significant factor in the arousal of unharmonious working relationship that could climax to disagreements, tensions and even litigations from management, staff and students that could influence effective operations and academic advancement in the university community.

The university system comprises a variety of communities based on the wide range of academic disciplines and functions. Its internal behaviour constitutes a very complex organism shaped by many hands. This implies that, internally the university 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 such as government policies and interferences. The combination of external pressures and internal pressures within the university system has made administration very difficult and complex, therefore conflict is inevitable. Conflicts have given rise to distrust and hostility among professionals and academics, thus contributing in hampering smooth, effective and efficient administration in the universities. It also appears that despite this situation, stakeholders in university education seem to develop non-challant attitude towards conflicts. If this role conflict is not checked, it can be descriptive and negative as people involved will often see one another as enemy.

Ndum and Okey (2013) stated that conflict in whichever form is generally unwholesome for the university community and Nigeria educational system as a whole. This aligned with the earlier assertion of Adeyemi (2010) that conflict occurs from time to time in the Nigeria school system (like university) due to the inability of the parties involved in the conflict to demonstrate ineptitude or incapability in strengthening or ironing out their differences. This implies that conflict is triggered or accentuated by acts of collision, clash or being opposition with individuals or persons that despite their different backgrounds are assigned similar, integrative and complementary roles and thus, expected to harmoniously work together in order to achieve their personal aspirations including collective and organizational goals.

In specificity, conflict can be both constructive and destructive. Constructive conflict (otherwise functional conflict) occurs when a person or staff respect other staff or person's viewpoints, ideas, beliefs, and assumptions, even when such viewpoints stirs divisions or disagreements among the personnel in the organizations (Adeyemi et al., 2014). Equally, destructive conflict (otherwise dysfunctional conflict) is believed to increase displeasure or unhappiness and decrease the affective wellbeing or happiness of employees thereby, resulting in the decline of organizational effectiveness (Ogbona et al., 2014). The foregoing definitions prompted Adeyemi and Ademila (2015) to ascribe constructive conflict as useful and welcomed for organizational efficiency. While dysfunctional conflict is considered damaging and is so should be discouraged in the organizations (like universities). This standpoint implies that the healthiness of an organization lies along a continuum and trajectory that ranges from a conflict-free organization to a conflict ridden organization.

From the foregoing, it is thus apparent that universities in Nigeria are not in any way immune from conflict that could circumstantially, deliberately or inevitably anticipated and arise in a situation where two or more people from different demographic backgrounds congregate, co-exist and interact in order to discharge services that could enhance organizational effectiveness. In addition, the complexity of the contemporary university system which

integrates humans in management, staff, student, visitor and entrepreneurial cadres (as university community members) from diverse religious, cultural, gender, age, academic, environmental and ethnic backgrounds and orientations makes the university system to be susceptible to either internal or external conflicts.

While external conflicts are accentuated by variety of external issues, dealings and functions. The internal behaviour constitutes a very complex organism shaped by these many hands. This implies that, internally the university life is shaped by many logic, habits and dynamics. It is also influenced by various challenges, constraints and pressures from the outer environment which culminates to make conflict as an inevitable practice and act that occurs in universities. Therefore, the blending or aggregations of both the external pressures and internal pressures within the university systems could make the functioning, operations and administration of such university to be very difficult, complex and unsustainable.

Similarly, conflicts are described as a by-product of the interaction of people or groups with different expectations, interests and backgrounds, in the society. In view of this, Olajide (2014) asserted that conflict which is often ascribed to be inevitable, unavoidable, natural and a normal part of the likely or probable occurrences in any system or university that is driven by humans from varying racial, educational, religious, marital, gender, age, among other characteristics that could affect harmonious working and effective functioning of universities. Corroborating this view, Fatile and Adejuwon (2015) emphasized that conflict which sometime inevitably occur in universities may perhaps be dysfunctional if mismanaged when its solutions are not localized or based on local approach. While at same time conflict could be desirable or somewhat appropriate when it occurs at minimal level so that it triggers a relatively bearable or considerable nature of change in the organizational activities, programmes and operations.

Instructively, the policies, programmes, activities and systems operated across majority of universities in Nigeria could become avenue for the accentuation of intra and inter and even external conflicts especially when local circumstances and dynamics are not considered. For instance, universities that operate residential institutions and are located in urban or municipal centres could be confronted with certain issues related to insufficient and inadequately or non-functional hall of residence, staff quarters, medical centres, water scheme, staff school, epileptic power supply, etc. that is and will continue to aggravate conflicts in the university community. This according to Zahidat and Sumaira (2014) explained why most state universities are non-residential as a way of deliberately forestalling and managing the varying crisis situations that may arise or emanate from the processes, programmes and policies adopted in especially state universities in Nigeria where there are certainly no halls of residence for students and staff but Health centres, water schemes, power plants are provided.

On the other hand, Osadeke et al. (2018) observed that conflicts are not always generated by disagreements among people in a social milieu (like university community) that remain unresolved. But also through the policies (like late school fees payment surcharge, no operation of cab services in the university environment, ban on student union activities, etc.), programmes (like closure of hostels days after exams, insufficient classrooms/laboratories, etc.) that are approved and adopted by the university management that could responsible for stirring the level of conflicts that overtime graduate to a unresolvable crisis and monster that would advance the implosion or collapse of the university system and community from not realizing the expected or anticipated goals or objectives. This standpoint implies that university managers or administrators could adopt processes, programmes, systems and policies that could incite the environment and make the course of carrying out their roles unattainable.

From the foregoing, conflict is thus, conceptualized in this study as the issues, clashes, misgivings, resentments, disagreements and reprisals that could arise or exist each time someone's inalienable or absolute right is challenged or trampled upon, when it is impossible for colleagues to understand their fellows, unable to empathize or appreciate their position, or even refuse to share the same opinion on the modalities for discharging or carrying out assigned responsibilities and designated actions in the university. This conception explains why conflict can arise as a result of objections, tensions, anxieties and resentments or antipathies that is experienced when an individual or group of people feels that their opinions and desires are likely to be jettisoned and not considered even by lower or higher cadre staff in the university. Hence, the existence of improperly managed tensed situations, skirmishes or frictions even in its slightest or minutest form could overtime trigger differences or disenchantments that could be antithetical to the successful attainment of the goals and mandates of especially public universities in Nigeria.

In addition, the triggers or acts towards the arousal of conflicts could be inevitable as well as a plague that all institutions and organizations (especially universities) in Nigeria are in the contemporary times facing serious crisis. Implicit upon this, conflict has now become a fundamental factor that could escalate the existence or occurrence of obvious or unavoidable issues that could reveal discrepancies among officials or staff that could likely affect sustainable development in Nigerian universities. Thus, the plausibility that conflicts could occur anytime or whenever in organizations necessitates the strategic and constructive management and handling of the causative factors of these conflicts that has the propensity to threaten the very existence of the organization, nation and society at large. This is the crux of this study. Hence, the point of departure could be prompting or opting for the adoption of conflict resolution strategies that would apply and integrate local dynamics in that accentuate strife, skirmishes, controversies, discords, discrepancies, antagonisms among other incompatible activities that accentuate conflict situations that is antithetical to the attainment of successes in universities.

Aim and Objective of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the strategies for conflict resolution: accommodation, compromise, and competition in improving university development in south-south Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of are to:

- Examine the impact of accommodation strategy on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.
- Determine the impact of compromise as a strategy on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.
- Ascertain the impact of competing strategy on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- How does accommodation strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria?

- How does compromise strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria?
- How does competing strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to further guide this research work and were tested at .05 level of significance:

- There is no significant relationship between accommodation strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.
- There is no significant relationship between compromise strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.
- There is no significant relationship between competing strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

Conflict

Some scholars view conflict as a source of innovation, creativity and development in organization. Ruben (1978) suggested that conflicts are vital for modern organizations; they are not only essential to the growth, change and evolution of living systems, but are as well as system's primary defense against stagnation, detachment, entropy and eventual extinction. Similarly, Aula (2000) argued that conflict is an important force in bringing out the difference among agent's opinions, logics and worldviews which in turn leads to more creative and novel outcomes.

Furthermore, conflict can be both constructive and destructive. Constructive conflict, which is also known as functional conflict is said to occur when an individual (like university management, academic staff, non-academic staff, students, visitors and vendors) have or exhibit respect for other individuals friendly and palatable alongside reproachful and challenging viewpoints, ideas, beliefs, and assumptions, even when such viewpoints stirs division or disagreement among the personnel in the organizations (Adeyemi et al., 2014). In addition, the tenets of functional or constructive conflict is considered useful for the organization and is thus, welcomed in universities (Adeyemi & Ademila, 2015). Equally, destructive conflict (otherwise dysfunctional conflict) is thought to increase dissatisfaction and decrease the affective wellbeing of the employees and decline the organizational efficacy. In view of this, it is discouraged in universities due to its propensity to damage the attainment of harmonious working relationship among the university community members (Ogbona et al., 2014). Thus, the state of health of an organization lies along a continuum that ranges from a conflict - free organization to a conflict ridden organization. However, whichever, conflict is envisaged as necessary occurs that warrants the setting up of systems and mechanisms to sustainably handle and resolve conflicts that arise in universities in Nigeria.

The foregoing definitions and explanations of conflict suggest that the general effects of conflict could be advantageous or disadvantageous to organizations. Obviously conflict is a part

of human consciousness in all aspects of life. One cannot avoid conflict whether at home, on the road at the workplace or in organizations. Conflict which has been viewed as impediment to organizational functioning poses severe operational challenges to educational institutions especially tertiary institutions, and needed to be carefully managed. This is to enable the system survive, grow, develop and reflect to the contemporary educational realities in Nigeria.

Many scholars suggest that conflict can both be constructive and destructive, Constructive conflict is known as functional conflict while destructive conflict is known as dysfunctional conflict. Functional conflict is defined as challenging of ideas, beliefs, and assumptions, and respect for others' viewpoints even when parties disagree (Massey & Dawes, 2007). It is considered useful for the organization and is therefore welcomed, while dysfunctional conflict is considered damaging and is therefore discouraged in the organizations. Dysfunctional conflict is thought to increase dissatisfaction and decrease the affective wellbeing of the employees and decline the organizational efficacy (Rahim, 2000; Guerra et al., 2005).

Many Universities in Nigeria are residential institutions with municipal characteristics such as Hall of residence, staff quarters, medical centres, water scheme, staff school, etc. Some state universities are non-residential. There are no halls of residence for students and staff but Health centres, water schemes, power plants are provided. All these are managed by university administrators, professionals and academic alike. In the course of carrying out their duties or roles there are bound to be conflicts. Stern (1991), Alade (1998) and Akorede (2005) noted that conflicts are natural part of life when disagreements among people in a social milieu remain unsolved, they graduate into conflicts, thereby necessitating the integration of strategies to effectively manage and resolve conflicts that arise in universities.

Oni (2015) averted that effectively and proactively instituted conflict management strategies enhances capacity through a number of measures by working with the parties involved in conflict for interaction. The above definition covers the entire area of handling conflicts positively, being proactive at and preventing conflict. In the view of Adaeze (2016), it is a diagnostic process or dialogue where strategies and intervention are designed to curtail the conflict. This implies that when conflict arises, the need is to become a positive solution provider, rather than generating a negative one, which threatens the individual or group, so as to cover conflict limitation, containment and litigation.

Additionally, the fundamental issues in the effective management of conflicts in especially universities lie in giving room to individual and group participation in the dialogues, interactions, meetings and programmes targeted at enhancing positive interventions and resolutions, which is paramount for university productivity and organizational development. Against this backdrop, conflict, as is often said, is an integral part of human existence and inevitable in any organization (Osakede et al., 2018) as the stakeholders have different incompatible goals. However, whenever a conflict occurs, it must be managed and handled constructively; else it will threaten the very existence of the organization, and the nation and society at large (Olaleye & Arogundade, 2013).

Conflict in the Nigerian Universities

It has been observed that Nigerian tertiary institutions especially universities are confronted with various constraints, such as poor infrastructures, increase in tuition fee, extortion money from students by the lecturer and sexual harassment, among others. These have given rise to distrust and hostility among the stakeholders of higher

institutions, hence militating against the smooth, effective and efficient administration in the institutions (Rahimi, 2012). In addition, university management or administrators seemed not to have been proactive to the threat posed by conflict in universities, which might engender the progress and development of the institutions if not properly managed.

Against the foregoing assertion or standpoint underscores, Osakede et al. (2018) accounted for the recent trends and evolution of crisis, skirmishes, clashes or disagreements that resulted in the truncation of the academic programme. For instance, the conflict that occurred in Lagos State University (LASU) in 2015, where the union prevented the vice chancellor Prof. John Obafunwa and some key officials in entering the main campus to perform their duties, singing and shouting 'Obafunwa must go'. Also similar incidents occurred in Adekunle Ajasin University Akungba-Akoko (AAUA), Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) and University of Benin (UNIBEN), Delta State University (DELSU), University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT) to mention a few universities conflicts led to the disruption of the academic programmes in Nigeria universities.

In addition, Osakede et al. (2018) stated that the occurrence of varying level or dimensions of conflicts has resulted or metamorphosed to student's actions that led to the setting of some of the school properties ablaze alongside the destruction of the university's properties worth millions of Naira. The highlights of the massive destruction, carnage and in some extreme cases death of humans (like students, university staff and even security agencies) resulted in the closure of the university thereby, leading to the disruption of the academic programmes of various universities in Nigeria over a period of time running into weeks, 1-3 months, 4-6 months, 7-10 months and even up to one year period.

Olaleye and Arogundade (2013) reiterated that certain scholars, researchers or academics have variedly claimed that conflict have been always perceived as negative, dysfunctional and destructive in all ramifications if not well-managed and appropriately regulated or coordinated. On the other hand, Bercovitch (2015) and Fatile and Adejuwon (2015) asserted that other members of the university community (management, lecturers, non-academic staff, students, visitors and vendors) are of the opinion that conflict serves as a catalyst for innovation, creativity of production and efficiency that culminate to the enhancement of positive results resulting in the development of systems and the society. This implies that the occurrence of conflicts give the impression and curiosity that numerous writers or critics believed that conflict infers negative implications to everyone disturbed or experiencing conflicts in the university and society.

Additionally, Adesina (2014) and Oladele (2015) jointly opined that conflict engenders interaction of individuals or group of individuals in the university community in relation to different expectations, views, interests and backgrounds in society. This implies that conflict can be observed or considered as unavoidable or inevitable and a normal or regular part or fragment of a society or an organization or institution (like university).

Conflicts in Nigerian universities are like growing monsters (Adeyemi & Ademola 2015). Prevailing crises that Nigerian universities are currently confronting are more than what they were in the past. Conflict has remained an instrument employed by students or groups in the pursuit of their personal or collective goals and the forums put in place by the management are much more far-reaching than ever before. However, the consequence of globalization and dynamic changes in the management of organizations have contributed positively and negatively to the Nigerian university system (Adeyemi et al., 2014), thus, it is required to curb crisis which has become more rampant in the Nigerian tertiary institutions resulting in poor academic performance of students and poor learning environment.

In brief, conflicts in Nigerian universities vary from one university to another in terms of capacity, environment, population, goal, specialization, governance and unionization, among others (Ogbona et al., 2014). It has been observed that the causes of conflicts in one university might differ from another (Ndum & Stella, 2013). However, university-based conflicts are also linked to other factors. The challenge underlying the university system can be classified as internal and external forces which create the type and nature of conflicts in place (Okotoni, 2012). Universities experience countless conflict situations, and the absence of their proper solution contributes to a highly adversary poor academic outcome. Obasan (2013) is of the view that conflicts are unique to the university settings; it may occur based on a wide range of issues such as norms, sexual harassment, policies and student behaviour, among others, which might lead to dispute in the campus. Yet, when conflicts occur, there are many similarities in the dispute culture across universities (Idowu, 2014). For instance, situations that may seemingly have no relationship with the university may become a source of major conflict and get played out at the university, which might lead to actions taken opposed by students (Adejuwon & Okewale, 2014).

Accommodating Strategy

The Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument illustrates that of the five conflict styles, accommodating or harmonizing, is viewed as the peacekeeper mode as it focuses more on preserving relationships than on achieving a personal goal or result. However, in a dispute this creates a lose/win relationship where the accommodating party may make a choice to acquiesce to the needs of the other, sometimes out of kindness and sometimes to avoid conflict or stress. "Giving in" and letting the other person "take" is the result when this choice is made. While this may be seen as a weak or non-productive position there are situations when this approach is preferable and will gain more for a person than by taking a strong position. It can be both a productive and unproductive strategy in the give and take process (Thomas & Kilmann, 1976).

Accommodating involves minimizing or suppressing real or perceived differences while focusing on the other's views of the situation. A manager using accommodating style of conflict management has more concern for the needs of the other party than his own. According to Schermerhorn (2000) cited in Momanyi and Juma (2016), a person using accommodating style of conflict management tends to be co-operative but assertive. They agree to the wishes of others, smoothing over or overlooking differences to maintain harmony. Accommodation results in a lose-win solution and a good relationship between parties are created. According to Hellriegel and Slocum (1996) cited in Momanyi and Juma (2016), this relationship is created when people appeal for co-operation and try to reduce tension and stress by offering reassurance and support for the other person's views.

Compromise Strategy

Conflict resolution is a vital aspect of maintaining harmony and efficiency in various domains, from personal relationships to international diplomacy. Among the myriad strategies employed, the compromise strategy stands out as a pragmatic method that seeks a middle ground between

conflicting parties. This approach involves each party making concessions to reach a mutually acceptable solution, emphasizing flexibility and mutual benefit (Cheta-Maclean, 2023).

The essence of compromise lies in its ability to integrate diverse perspectives and needs into a balanced resolution. It is predicated on the principle of give-and-take, where each party relinquishes certain demands to achieve a workable solution (Ololube, 2024). This strategy is particularly effective in scenarios where stakeholders have competing interests but no party holds a decisive advantage or is willing to accept a win-lose outcome.

One significant advantage of the compromise strategy is its capacity to foster cooperation and preserve relationships. Unlike adversarial approaches that may exacerbate hostilities, compromise promotes a spirit of collaboration and respect. According to Ololube (2024), compromise allows parties to address their core interests while maintaining a level of goodwill. This is crucial in ongoing relationships, as it helps to build trust and prevent future conflicts.

However, compromise is not without its limitations. It may sometimes result in suboptimal solutions where neither party's needs are fully met, potentially leading to dissatisfaction or future grievances (Cheta-Maclean & Tobins, 2023). This is particularly relevant in high-stakes conflicts where the stakes are too high for the parties to accept less-than-ideal outcomes. In such cases, compromise may be seen as a temporary fix rather than a comprehensive solution.

Despite these limitations, the compromise strategy remains a valuable tool in conflict resolution. Its effectiveness often depends on the willingness of the parties involved to engage in honest dialogue and demonstrate flexibility. For instance, in labor disputes, compromise can lead to agreements that balance employee demands with organizational constraints, thus preventing work stoppages and fostering long-term stability (Onyekwere, 2024).

In summary, the compromise strategy is a practical approach to conflict resolution that emphasizes flexibility, cooperation, and mutual concession. While it may not always provide a perfect solution, it facilitates the resolution of conflicts by integrating diverse perspectives and preserving relationships. As Ololube (2024) asserted, compromise, when approached with a spirit of goodwill and open communication, can effectively address conflicts and lead to sustainable resolutions.

Competing Strategy

In conflict resolution, various strategies can be employed to address disagreements and disputes. One of such strategy is the competing method, which is characterized by a win-lose orientation where one party seeks to prevail at the expense of the other. This approach, while often perceived as aggressive, can be effective in specific contexts where decisive action is needed.

The competing strategy also referred to as a competing or forcing approach, involves one party asserting its position with the goal of achieving its objectives regardless of the other party's interests (Ololube, 2024). It is commonly used in situations where the stakes are high, and a quick resolution is necessary. This strategy can be particularly effective in emergencies or when a firm stance is required to uphold important principles or ensure compliance with rules and regulations (Cheta-Maclean, 2023).

One of the primary strengths of the competing strategy is its ability to achieve immediate and clear results. In scenarios where there is no room for compromise or where a firm decision is required, such as in legal disputes or organizational decisions, competing can provide a straightforward path to resolution. For instance, in competitive sports or business negotiations, a

competing strategy might drive performance and innovation by pushing individuals or teams to excel and outperform their counterparts (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011).

However, the competing strategy also has its drawbacks. Its win-lose nature can lead to heightened tensions and damage relationships, particularly if the approach is perceived as unfair or overly aggressive. The adversarial nature of this strategy can exacerbate conflict and lead to long-term resentment or retaliation (Ololube, 2024). Furthermore, it may not be suitable in collaborative environments where maintaining positive relationships is crucial for ongoing cooperation and success.

The effectiveness of the competing strategy often depends on the context and the nature of the conflict. In situations where power dynamics favor one party, or where the resolution of the conflict is critical to achieving strategic objectives, competing may be the most appropriate approach. For instance, in high-stakes negotiations where the parties have fundamentally opposing goals, a competing strategy may ensure that one party's interests are fully protected (Cheta-Maclean & Tobins, 2023).

According to Onyekwere (2024), the competing strategy is a method of conflict resolution that focuses on achieving one's own objectives at the expense of the other party. While it can be effective in certain situations requiring decisive action or when quick results are needed, it also carries the risk of damaging relationships and exacerbating conflict. Understanding when stakeholders are competing there must be balancing with other conflict resolution approaches, is crucial for managing disputes effectively and maintaining healthy interactions.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive and correlational design. The population of this study comprised all the staff (academic and non-academic staff) in twenty (20) (7 Federal and 13 State) public universities in South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. The sample of the study comprised 900 respondents (180 management staff, 300 registry staff, and 420 academic staff) in twelve (12) public universities.

The instrument for data collection was titled “Strategies for Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (SCRQ). The SCRQ instrument was a self-structured 21 item questionnaire that was patterned after a four point rating scale of “Strongly Agree” (SA, 4 Points), “Agree” (A, 3 Points), “Disagree” (D, 2 Points), and “Strongly Disagree” (SD, 1 Point). Furthermore, the SCRQ instrument consisted of three sections, Sections ‘A’ consisted the demographic information of the respondents (management staff, registry staff and academic staff). Section ‘B’ comprised 21 items on the variables of conflict management strategies showing possible items on how accommodation strategy impact on the development of federal and state universities (in items 1-7), how compromise strategy impact on the development of federal and state universities (in items 8-14), and how competing strategy impact on the development of federal and state universities (in items 15-21), while Section ‘C’ comprised 9 items on the variables of university development (dependent variable).

The face and content validity of the SCRQ instrument was determined by three experts in the Department of Educational Foundations (Ignatius Ajuru University of Education). The reliability and internal consistency of the SCRQ instrument was ascertained using Cronbach Alpha method with a reliability coefficient of .921 for the SCRQ instrument. The data for this study was sourced from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data source was gotten from information that was generated from the questionnaire or instrument that was

administered to the respondents (management staff, registry staff and academic staff) in the universities (federal and state) in South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. While the secondary data source was gotten from the information contained in textbooks, journals, magazines, newspapers, articles, lecture notes, monogram, modules, blogs, internet materials and other documented publications. 900 copies of the SCRQ instrument was administered to the respondents (management staff, bursary staff and lecturers), 867 copies (representing approximately 96% return rate) were validly retrieved and used for the analysis.

Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions (at criterion mean cut-off of 2.50), while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. All analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0.

RESULTS

Answer to Research Questions

Research Question 1: How does accommodation strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on how accommodation strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria

S/N	How accommodation strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.	N=867			
		N=427		N=440	
		Federal University		State University	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	Accommodation strategy has an effect on employee productivity	3.27	.77	2.85	.59
2	Accommodation strategy has no effect on employee productivity	3.47	.58	3.03	.48
3	Accommodation makes it easy for staff to focus on their job	3.32	.51	2.79	.76
4	Accommodation engenders peaceful staff coexistence	3.20	.55	2.85	.69
5	Accommodation engenders cooperation	3.19	.69	2.83	.80
6	Accommodation engenders preservation of relationships which leads to achieving personal goals	3.33	.52	2.90	.67
7	Accommodation strategy is effect on university development	3.27	.54	2.76	.75
Grand Mean		3.29	0.59	2.86	0.68

* (Agree) = ≥ 2.50 while # (Disagree) < 2.50 .

Table 1 shows the mean rating and standard deviation on how accommodation strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. It further shows how accommodation strategy impact on the development of federal and state universities in South-South Nigeria include: accommodation strategy has no effect on employee productivity (with $\bar{x} = 3.47$ and $\bar{x} = 3.03$ respectively) in item 2, accommodation engenders preservation of relationships which

leads to achieving personal goals (\bar{x} =3.33 and \bar{x} =2.90 respectively) in item 6, accommodation makes it easy for staff to focus on their job (\bar{x} =3.32 and \bar{x} =2.79 respectively) in item 3, accommodation strategy has an effect on employee productivity (\bar{x} =3.27 and \bar{x} =2.85 respectively) in item 1, accommodation strategy has an effect on university development (\bar{x} =3.27 and \bar{x} =2.76 respectively) in item 7, accommodation engenders peaceful staff coexistence (\bar{x} =3.20 and \bar{x} =2.85 respectively) in item 4, while the least was accommodation engenders cooperation (\bar{x} =3.19 and \bar{x} =2.83 respectively) in item 5. Furthermore the grand mean scores of 3.29 and 2.86 indicates that items 1-7 relates to how accommodation strategy impact on the development of federal and state universities in South-South Nigeria.

Research Question 2: How does compromise strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on how compromise strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria

S/N	How compromise strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria	N=867			
		N=427		N=440	
		Federal University		State University	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
8	Compromise helps in balancing the needs of all parties to a conflict	3.21	.67	2.86	.61
9	This strategy helps in resolving issues faster	3.30	.59	2.98	.44
10	Provides temporary solutions while looking for a permanent solution	3.28	.51	2.95	.58
11	Lowers tension and stress resulting from conflict	3.21	.71	2.80	.71
12	Compromise helps the university community to get along with one another	3.35	.53	2.99	.55
13	Compromise helps in distribution of responsibilities and funds	3.30	.55	2.86	.59
14	Helps maintain relationships within the university community	3.31	.64	2.96	.54
Grand Mean		3.28	0.52	2.91	0.57

* (Agree) = ≥ 2.50 while # (Disagree) < 2.50.

Table 2 shows the mean rating and standard deviation on how compromise strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. It further shows that how compromise strategy impact on the development of federal and state universities in South-South Nigeria include: compromise helps the university community to get along with one another (with \bar{x} =3.35 and \bar{x} =2.99 respectively) in item 12, helps maintain relationships within the university community (\bar{x} =3.31 and \bar{x} =2.96 respectively) in item 14, this strategy helps in resolving issues faster (\bar{x} =3.30 and \bar{x} =2.98 respectively) in item 9, compromise helps in distribution of responsibilities and funds (\bar{x} =3.30 and \bar{x} =2.86 respectively) in item 13, provides temporary solutions while looking for a permanent solution (\bar{x} =3.28 and \bar{x} =2.95 respectively) in item 10, compromise helps in balancing the needs of all parties to a conflict (\bar{x} =3.21 and \bar{x} =2.86

respectively) in item 8, while the least was lowers tension and stress resulting from conflict ($\bar{x} = 3.21$ and $\bar{x} = 2.86$ respectively) in item 11. Furthermore the grand mean scores of 3.28 and 2.91 indicates that items 8-14 relates to how compromise strategy impact on the development of federal and state universities in South-South Nigeria.

Research Question 3: How does competing strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation on how competing strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria

S/N	How competing strategy impact on the development of Universities in South-South Nigeria	N=867			
		N=427		N=440	
		Federal University		State University	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
15	Advocating the needs of staff engenders university development	3.04	.58	2.90	.41
16	Competing helps in taking decisions faster especially in crises situation	3.27	.67	2.89	.53
17	Desire to be competitive could have a negative effect on relationships within the university community	3.28	.57	2.85	.56
18	Helps in examining the options raised by all parties to conflict	3.21	.61	2.85	.50
19	Ample attention and thought given to parties to conflict	3.19	.67	2.84	.60
20	Extreme assertiveness can strain relationship hence the need to be subtle with parties to conflict	3.25	.65	2.84	.60
21	If staff don't feel heard, they may not be loyal hence there is a need to always engage with members of staff	3.25	.60	2.74	.82
Grand Mean		3.21	0.62	2.84	0.57

* (Agree) = ≥ 2.50 while # (Disagree) < 2.50.

Table 3 shows the mean rating and standard deviation on how competing strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. It further shows that how competing strategy impact on the development of federal and state universities in South-South Nigeria include: desire to be competitive could have a negative effect on relationships within the university community (with $\bar{x} = 3.28$ and $\bar{x} = 2.85$ respectively) in item 17, competing helps in taking decisions faster especially in crises situation ($\bar{x} = 3.27$ and $\bar{x} = 2.89$ respectively) in item 16, extreme assertiveness can strain relationship hence the need to be subtle with parties to conflict ($\bar{x} = 3.25$ and $\bar{x} = 2.84$ respectively) in item 20, if staff don't feel heard, they may not be loyal hence there is a need to always engage with members of staff ($\bar{x} = 3.25$ and $\bar{x} = 2.74$ respectively) in item 21, helps in examining the options raised by all parties to conflict ($\bar{x} = 3.21$ and $\bar{x} = 2.84$ respectively) in item 18, ample attention and thought given to parties to conflict ($\bar{x} = 3.19$ and $\bar{x} = 2.84$ respectively) in item 19, while the least was advocating the needs of staff engenders university development ($\bar{x} = 3.04$ and $\bar{x} = 2.90$ respectively) in item 15. Furthermore

the grand mean scores of 3.21 and 2.84 indicates that items 15-21 relates to how competing strategy impact on the development of federal and state universities in South-South Nigeria.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between accommodation strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.

Table 4: Summary of Pearson Correlations between accommodation strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria

		Accommodation Strategy	Development of Universities	Decision
Accommodation Strategy	Pearson Correlation	1	.770**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000*	Rejected
	N	867	867	
Development of Universities	Pearson Correlation	.770**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000*		
	N	867	867	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows a Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) of .770 which indicates a relationship between accommodation strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. This means that accommodation strategy contributed to the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. In other words, approximately 61% of the observed changes in the development of universities in South-South Nigeria was caused by accommodation strategy, thereby leaving 39% changes to be caused by other variables that are extraneous to accommodation strategy. This implies that accommodation strategy was a strong predictor that would tend to influence the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. Similarly, the result also shows that the correlation between accommodation strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria is statistically significant at .000 (p<.05 level of significance). Thus, hypothesis 1 was rejected, which means that there is a significant relationship between accommodation strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between compromise strategy and the development of Universities in South-South Nigeria.

Table 5: Summary of Pearson Correlations between compromise strategy and the development of Universities in South-South Nigeria

		Compromise Strategy	Development of Universities	Decision
Compromise Strategy	Pearson Correlation	1	.768**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000*	Rejected
	N	867	867	
Development of Universities	Pearson Correlation	.768**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000*		
	N	867	867	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows a Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) of .724 which indicates a relationship between compromise strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. This means that compromise strategy contributed to the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. In other words, approximately 61% of the observed changes in the development of universities in South-South Nigeria are caused by compromise strategy, thereby leaving 39% changes to be caused by other variables that are extraneous to compromise strategy. This implies that compromise strategy was a strong predictor that would tend to influence the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. Similarly, the result also shows that the correlation between compromise strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria is statistically significant at .000 ($p < .05$ level of significance). Thus, hypothesis 2 was rejected, which means that there is a significant relationship between compromise strategy and the development of Universities in South-South Nigeria.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between competing strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.

Table 6: Summary of Pearson Correlations between competing strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria

		Competing Strategy	Development of Universities	Decision
Competing Strategy	Pearson Correlation	1	.771**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.005*	Rejected
	N	867	867	
Development of Universities	Pearson Correlation	.771**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005*		
	N	867	867	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 shows a Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) of .771 which indicates a relationship between competing strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. This means that competing strategy contributes to the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. In other words, approximately 59% of the observed changes in the development of universities in South-South Nigeria are caused by competing strategy, thereby leaving 41% changes to be caused by other variables that are extraneous to competing strategy. This implies that competing strategy was a strong predictor that would tend to influence the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. Similarly, the result also shows that the correlation between competing strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria is statistically significant at .000 ($p < 0.05$ level of significance). Thus, hypothesis 3 was rejected, which means that there is a significant relationship between competing strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.

DISCUSSION

How Accommodation Strategy Impact on the Development of Universities in South-South Nigeria

The result in Table 1 revealed grand mean scores of 3.29 and 2.86 which indicates that how accommodation strategy impact on the development of federal and state universities in South-South Nigeria include: accommodation strategy has no effect on employee productivity, accommodation engenders preservation of relationships which leads to achieving personal goals, accommodation makes it easy for staff to focus on their job, accommodation strategy has an effect on employee productivity, accommodation engenders peaceful staff coexistence, and accommodation engenders cooperation. This finding aligns with previous finding Momanyi and Juma (2016) that the adoption of accommodation conflict management strategy tends to be cooperative but assertive in managing differences targeted at maintaining harmony that would increase the intensify teamwork, preserve relationships, increase staff work rate and focus on their job, peaceful staff coexistence, ethical cooperation and high level collaboration that would culminate to employee productivity including achievement of the mandate and goals of universities.

The research aligns with the finding of this study since accommodating as a conflict resolution strategy would facilitate the harmonious relationship that is considered as the intermediary for peaceful coexistence approach among staff (comprising management, academic staff, and non-academic staff) including students in universities. This would increase the emphasis on preserving relationships, enhancing collaboration, effective teamwork, and imbining of ethical work environment towards achieving personal goal or result and organizational objectives in universities in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. In addition, the enthronement of accommodation strategy would enhance peaceful staff coexistence and cooperation likely to facilitate acquiesce or consent and the existence of harmonious relationship that elude or eliminate the arousal of conflict, stress or disputes that could affect the attainment of productivity in universities in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Furthermore, the result in Table 4 revealed a Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) of .770 and p -value of .000, which indicates a positive, strong and significant relationship between accommodation strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. This finding aligns with the position of Momanyi and Juma (2016) that accommodating conflict resolution or management strategy is regarded as the "peacekeeper" since it concentrates or emphasizes on the increased preservation of working relationships that would facilitate the achievement of individual aspirations as well as holistic organizational or institutional (like universities) goals or objectives. Accordingly, this therefore, implies that accommodation strategy sets systems that helps to contain the views of disputing parties thereby creating a lose/win relationship where the cooperation of staff would enhance the acceptance of all sheds of opinions and the associated avoidance of conflicts.

The research aligns with the finding of this study as the continuation of accommodation strategy would strongly and correspondingly influence the adoption and institutionalization of alternative dispute resolution, collective bargaining, collaboration, effective communication, healthy competition, cooperation, and maximum productivity that would undoubtedly result in the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. This finding is consistent with Momanyi and Juma (2016) that a person using accommodating style of conflict management tends to be

co-operative but assertive. Accordingly, accommodation strategy help staff across management, academic, non-academic and studentship positions to agree to the desires of other staff in order to maintain harmony in the university system.

From the foregoing, it is further observed that accommodating conflict resolution strategy could be considered as a behaviour, reasoning and attitude that may be motivated and promoted by the desire to be charitable or pro-social approach and attitude that seems or appears to be seen or viewed as the best or paramount conflict resolution strategy that would accommodate all parties or individuals in an organization (like university) even when they are truly in conflict, dispute or weak position. Thus, this situation of accommodation may effectively arise when the management of universities sets systems and processes towards preserving and sustaining the peace and avoiding the necessary disharmony that could more importantly affect the quest for reaching a solution that would most likely maximize the realization of individual and group interests. Instructively, the issue of accommodation conflict resolution strategy could improve the style for handling, avoiding and dealing with unassertiveness, inharmoniousness and uncooperativeness which could often lead to unproductively in organizations. Thus, accommodation stems as a strategy that would enable individuals either improve or worsen a conflict situation. This procedure may thus be desirable in certain cases to ensure a short-term benefit or temporary solution to the organization

How Compromise Strategy Impact on the Development of Universities in South-South Nigeria

The result in Table 2 revealed grand mean scores of 3.28 and 2.91 which indicates that how compromise strategy impact on the development of federal and state universities in South-South Nigeria include: compromise helps the university community to get along with one another, helps maintain relationships within the university community, this strategy helps in resolving issues faster, compromise helps in distribution of responsibilities and funds, provides temporary solutions while looking for a permanent solution, compromise helps in balancing the needs of all parties to a conflict, and lowers tension and stress resulting from conflict. This finding is in agreement with Ahmed (2015) that the compromise conflict resolution strategy facilitate in the provision of temporary relief and solutions while figuring out or looking out for a permanent, enduring or long-lasting solutions towards the handling of conflicting solutions, compromise helps in balancing the needs of all parties to a conflict, and lowers tension and stress resulting from conflict. Additionally, the finding of the study is consistent with the assertion of Mogaji (2019) that compromise strategy enables public universities (both federal and state) to help the members of the university community to get along with one another, maintain effective relationship, enhance faster resolution of issues, professional distribution of responsibilities including equitable disbursement of funds in order to facilitate the development of universities in Nigeria.

The researcher aligns with this finding since compromise strategy is geared towards enhancing effective work environment that would lead to the maintenance of proper funding that would increase effective management and productivity in public universities (federal and state) in Nigeria. This standpoint aligns with the position of Ahmed (2015) that the integration and practice of compromise would eliminate eminent disparity in the distribution and management of funds and resources among federal and state universities that could reduce lack of internally generated revenue that escalates financial crisis or conflicts in universities

The result in Table 5 revealed a Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) of .724 and p -value of .000, which indicates a positive, strong and significant relationship between compromise strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. This finding is in agreement with the position of Ahmed (2015) that the enthronement of compromise would enhance the tackling of inconsistencies or differences that could impede federal and state universities effective utilization of funds and resources that would be integrated towards the improvement in staff welfare, efficient teamwork, collaboration and conciliation that would facilitate the effective development and administration effectiveness in universities in Nigeria. This implies that compromise could be ascribed as an enhancer of harmonious relationship among university staff alongside a contributor of organizational effectiveness and productivity as well as attaining individual aspirations and universities collective or holistic goals or objectives in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

The study aligns with this finding as compromise strategy continue to increase then the development of universities in South-South Nigeria would be strongly and correspondingly influenced thereby resulting to alternative dispute resolution, collective bargaining, collaboration, effective communication, healthy competition, cooperation, and maximum productivity among staff and the university community in South-South Nigeria. This finding is consistent with the views of Mogaji (2019) that the integration of compromise in public universities (both federal and state) is geared towards enhancing the application and institutionalization of alternative conflict resolution, cooperative negotiating, teamwork, enhanced partnership, effective communication and vigorous cooperation that would manifest into the achievement of maximum performance of individuals (like management, staff and students) alongside, optimal productivity of the universities in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

How Competing Strategy Impact on the Development of Universities in South-South Nigeria

The result in Table 3 grand mean scores of 3.21 and 2.84 which indicates that how competing strategy impact on the development of federal and state universities in South-South Nigeria include: desire to be competitive could have a negative effect on relationships within the university community, competing helps in taking decisions faster especially in crises situation, extreme assertiveness can strain relationship hence the need to be subtle with parties to conflict, if staff don't feel heard, they may not be loyal hence there is a need to always engage with members of staff, helps in examining the options raised by all parties to conflict, ample attention and thought given to parties to conflict, and advocating the needs of staff engenders university development. This finding is consistent with the position of Adamu et al. (2016) that the integration of competing conflict management strategy in universities would help in faster decision making, the timely consideration opinions raised by conflicting parties, and eliminating the issue of extreme assertiveness that would reduce crises situation with its attendant negative effects that could affect the level of relationships among staffs and their positive aspirations that would enhance productivity within the university community.

The researcher aligns with the finding of this study as the adoption or integration of competing strategy would tend to improve members of the university community (like management, academic staff, non-academic staff, students and entrepreneurs) great confidence, motivation and interest in becoming committed and loyal towards aligning with the aims and

aspirations of the universities in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. This standpoint aligns with the position of Awan and Anjum (2015) that competing strategy stems as an effective conflict management approach or plan that could bring about positive results like employee morale, promotion of open-minded communication, ethical collaborative, efficient decision making processes, systematic feedback or response, and well-timed conflict resolution strategy. Against this backdrop, the result of this study implies that effective conflict management strategy are geared towards the maintenance and sustenance of healthy relationship that would be easy for even conflicting parties to coexist and harmoniously relate with staff in organizations in such a way that those staff become increasingly loyal and committed towards advocating the ideals, goals and mandate of the universities in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Furthermore, the result in Table 6 revealed a Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) of .771 and p -value of .000, which indicates a positive, strong and significant relationship between competing strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. This finding is in agreement with Adamu et al. (2016) that competing strategy is ideally a conflict management strategy that facilitates the effectiveness in the functionality of systems and processes towards the smooth workability and operation of the university in such a way that the issues capable of escalating conflicts are prevented in the universities. This implies that competing strategy suffices as an effective conflict management approach that enables organizations or institutions (like universities) to effectively recognize the causes of conflicts, clashes or skirmishes in universities alongside, instituting the processes, modalities and measures that would facilitate the effective implementation of programmes, activities and objectives of the universities in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Hence, the researcher aligns with this finding because as competing strategy continue to increase then the development of universities in South-South Nigeria between 2010 and 2020 would be strongly and correspondingly influenced thereby resulting to alternative dispute resolution, collective bargaining, collaboration, effective communication, healthy competition, cooperation, and maximum productivity among staff and the university community in South-South Nigeria. This finding is consistent with Putman and Boys (2006) that competing strategy stems as conflict management strategies that would facilitate healthy competition, cooperation, and maximum productivity that enhance the actualization of intentions or plans that would guarantee the staff engagement in actions or activities that aids in universities realization of its collective goals and mandates. In addition, this finding is in agreement with the position of Awan and Anjum (2015) that effectively managing conflict can bring about positive results like promotion of open communication, collaborative decision making, regular feedback and timely settlement of conflict. They also argued that in return, unmanaged conflict can as well promote dysfunctional communication and poor behaviour among employees which can have effect on overall employee morale thereby resulting in lower productivity.

The researcher agrees with this standpoint as competing conflict management strategies avails as the list or collection of the preferred choices for effectively handling and managing a conflict or dispute situation among staff including students and vendor in the university system. This standpoint buttresses that conflict management strategies are not conflict resolution. Conflict management strategies involve implementing skills to limit the negative aspects of conflict and to increase the positive aspects of conflict at a level equal to or higher than where the conflict is taking place.

Conflict is often times managed differently according to the parties involved and the context surrounding the conflict. From the analysis conducted thus, far, could be deduced that

from the types of conflicts to the conflict management strategies in public universities in South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. Alongside, its dimensions (collaboration, avoidance, accommodation, compromise, and competing strategies) that were subsequently examined and correlated herein with university development as the dependent variable in this study. There seems to be a consistent pattern of high mean scores obtained by federal universities as against the relatively low mean scores obtained by state universities in all the research questions. This pattern of results is indicative and could implicitly explain that the federal universities more than the state universities could be said to have functional systems, processes and strategies for managing and resolving conflicts that may arise and with the tendency to affect the smooth, effective and uninterrupted conduct of schooling programmes, activities and objectives in universities in South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria.

This foregoing standpoint aligns with the earlier position of Dimunah (2017) that state universities were established in response to the growing pressure to accommodate and admit potential university students from respective component states who may have failed to get admission into federal universities. This major reason behind the formation of state universities due to lack of capacity of federal universities to receive all students seeking admission according to Salihu and Jamil (2015) suggested a hasty, faulty and unconventional pre-establishment consideration that can accentuate their (i.e. state universities) susceptibility or weakness to proactively understand and institute crisis and conflicts management strategies that may inevitably occur in the university system. This could influence what Atanda (2017) ascribe as the challenges of a combination of limited access to grants, increased cost, decreasing quality of education, poor welfare and inflexibility in course selection that is confronting most of Nigeria's component state owned higher institutions or universities.

Thus, Ahmed (2015) noted a disparity regarding conflict management, funds and resources between federal and state universities is sequel to the fact that most state governments (as the owners or managers of state universities in Nigeria) are known and inundated with grossly insufficient statutory allocation and internally generated revenue that their heavily reliance on such is in itself a crisis and conflict situation that now transcends to the university system that seemingly require large resources in order to accomplish its goal of managing human and material resources. Hence there is a need to always engage with members of staff, helps in examining the options raised by all parties to conflict, ample attention and thought given to parties to conflict, and advocating the needs of staff engenders university development effectively so as to prevent it from escalating to the point that the organization would not be able to handle it. Conflict management is the ability of an organization to identify the sources of conflict and implement effective measures to bring it under control.

Putman and Boys (2006) viewed conflict management strategies as a choice, intention or plan of action based on a person's goals and his or her analysis of the situation. This definition by Putman and Boys was conceptualizing conflict management strategies as the preferred choice of handling a conflict based on the parties involved in the conflict. Conflict is often times managed differently according to the parties involved and the context surrounding the conflict. Conflict management strategies are not conflict resolution. Conflict management strategies involve implementing skills to limit the negative aspects of conflict and to increase the positive aspects of conflict at a level equal to or higher than where the conflict is taking place.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that: inter-organizational conflict, inter-personal conflict, community related conflict, intra-unit/departmental conflict, inter-departmental conflict, and intra-personal conflict were the types of conflict that exist in both federal and state universities in South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. This warranted the adoption of alternative dispute resolution, arbitration, conciliation, avoidance, compromise, collective bargaining, and accommodation as the conflict management strategies that were adopted in both federal and state universities in South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria.

In specificity, the effective communication amongst staff depicts collaboration strategy as a mechanism for the reduction of work tension, unhealthy competition, quick goal attainment, and enhanced cooperation that would facilitate cooperation and development in the university community. Instructively, the accommodation strategy would facilitate employee productivity, preservation of relationships, peaceful staff coexistence and cooperation that would lead to the achievement of personal goals and employee productivity. Conclusively, the integration of compromise strategy would help the university community to resolve issues faster, distribute responsibilities and equitably utilize funds in such a way that it lowers tension and stress that would automatically trigger conflict in the university.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of the study the following recommendations were proffered:

- Universities are encouraged to adopt dispute resolution strategies such as accommodation, compromise and collective bargaining to improve working relationship that would enhance university development.
- University management are encouraged to set systems that would institutionalize the sharing of information and identification of issues and options that would facilitate easy and quick resolution and settlement inter-departmental and inter-personal conflicts existing in universities.
- University management are encouraged to initiate conflict management strategies that would specifically identify internal dynamics, undercurrents and local causative factors in order to institute specific interventions towards the positive and effective conflict resolutions in that university.
- University staff are encourage to adopt compromise that would help in balancing the needs of all parties thereby reducing the tension and stress from conflict situations.

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