UNIVERSITY COLLECTIVE BARGAINING STRATEGIES AND CONFLICTS RESOLUTION FOR A PEACEFUL HIGHER EDUCATION ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The level of conflict in Nigeria Universities over the last four to five decades cannot be over-estimated. Most of the Conflicts revolves around wages, collective bargaining resulting in strikes closures and distorted academic calendars. Several studies have recommended strategies and ideas that have not met the required solutions for peaceful co-existence in our academic environment hence this study investigated conflict resolution strategies for a peaceful Higher Academic Environment in Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive surveyresearch design with the population that consists of all staff in Universities in South West Nigeria. The multi- stage sampling procedure was adopted to select 1200 academic staff fromeach of the four selected universities in South West Nigeria while 200 management staffs werealso selected. Three instruments were designed by the researcher were used on the study titled Academic Staff Complaints Questionnaire (ASCSQY) r=0.74 and Non-Academic Staff Complaints Satisfactory Questionnaire (NASCQ) r=0.91. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings of the study indicated x=2.84 and std Dev=0.83 for awareness of conflict resolution strategies. Also revealed in the findings was that the current dispute resolution strategies are inadequate. It is therefore recommended that a special conflict resolution office be opened in all Nigerian Universities.

Keywords: University, Collective Bargaining, Strategies, Conflicts Resolution, Peaceful Higher Education, Academic Environment

Introduction

Disputes are inevitable in any organization. This is more apparent in an establishment like a university with a structure that allows two or more units or groups to share functional boundaries in achieving set objectives. In universities, people with different characteristics andnature -students, lecturers and administrative staff - have to work harmoniously together, hence, the development of an organizational structure that involves academic staff and non- academic staff, on one hand, and academic staff and students and non-academic and studentswho share functional boundaries of exchange of knowledge. Education is widely accepted as a major instrument for promoting socio-economic, political and cultural development in Nigeria (Ekundayo & Ajayi 2009). Education also is as essential to man as life itself on thisplanet, earth. Societies through ages have one form of education or the other, whether indigenous or western. Education varies through space and time. Education is a very importantmeans of developing any nation (Babafemi, 2010).

Universities educate future leaders and develop the high-level technical capacities that underpin economic growth and development (Odekunle, 2011). All over the world, universities are recognized as centres of excellence, where knowledge is not only acquired butalso disseminated on to those who require it (Arikewuyo, 2007). With this, it can be deduced that educational acquisition of a nation is not complete without the existence of a university or universities.

As any organization grows, the tendency for it to expand its operation and workforce also becomes imminent. In view of these, simple and complex complaints by the organizational stakeholders cannot be over emphasized. Universities are unique institutions, notable for the complexity of relationships within them and the inherent power imbalance among administrators, teachers, and students. Complaints from conditions of service and disciplinaryactions that inevitably arise in this environment require correspondingly unique procedures that while best handling all complaints, avoid mirroring that complexity. Unfortunately, the cost of a single mishandled complaint can be high in both direct monetary terms and damage to the reputation of individuals and to that of the agency involved. In experience, universitiespay a higher cost in this respect than any other type of agency (Barbour, 2006). For this reason,in terms of prudent risk management, universities need to adopt an organised and professionalapproach to complaint handling. Although individual thinkers, like Kant (2011) had long recognised the centrality of peace. Complaints, however takes many forms in organisations. According to Wikipedia, there is the inevitable clash between formal authority and power with respect to individuals and groups. There are disputes over how revenues should be divided, how work should be done and how long and hard people should work. He stated further that there are jurisdictional disagreements among individuals, departments and between unions andmanagement.

The rate of disruptions of academic programs in form of go-slows, strikes and riots in public universities in Nigeria has increased tremendously in the past decades to an extent that it became difficult for both staff and students to tell when their studies would end. This aspect was one of the prompting factors for the present study. The art of conflict resolution or conflict management is grounded on the fundamental principles of management processes as outlined by Taylor (1911). Conflict management as a process entails resembling of activities of planning and monitoring the performance of a process, especially in the sense of a conflict resolution process. It involves the application of knowledge, skills, tools, techniques and systems to define, visualize, measure, control, report and improve processes with the goal to aharmonious environment of co-existence.

A dispute mechanism is a structured process that addresses disputes or grievances that arise between two or more parties engaged in business, societal relationships. Dispute mechanismsare used in dispute resolution, and may incorporate conciliation, conflict resolution, mediationand negotiation. Dispute mechanisms are typical non-judicial in nature, meaning that they arenot resolved within the court of law. According to research produced by the non-judicial grievance mechanism task force of John Ruggie, Special Representative of Business and Human Rights to the United Nations, those who designed and oversee nonjudicial mechanismsshould acknowledge core human rights processes defined by "all core UN human rights treaties.

Dispute mechanisms comprise a way for socially responsible establishments to meet requirements of corporate responsibility-related agreements or pacts, community concerns. According to a publication by the Complianee Advisor/Ombudsman of the World Bank Group, "locally-based grievance resolution mechanism(s) provide a promising avenue by offering a reliable structure and set of approaches where local people and the company can find reduce risk while capacity-building or developing internationally, and assist larger processes that create positive social change. Dispute mechanisms are an increasingly effective tool for establishing communication channels between organisations and communities. When successful, they offer a trusted way for local peoples and communities to voice and resolve concerns related to development projects, while providing companies with transparent, effective ways to address effective solutions together.

Dispute occurs between people in all kinds of human relationships and in all social settings. Because of the wide range of potential differences among people, the absence of conflict usually signals the absence of meaningful interaction. Conflict by itself is neither good nor bad. However, the manner in which conflict is handled determines whether it is constructive or destructive (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000). Conflict is defined as an incompatibility of goals or values between two or more parties in a relationship, combined with attempts to control each other and antagonistic feelings toward each other (Fisher, 1990). The incompatibility ordifference may exist in reality or may only be perceived by the parties involved in the conflict.Nonetheless, the opposing actions and the hostile emotions are very real hallmarks of human conflict in any organisation. Conflict has the potential for either a great deal of destruction, construction or much creativity and positive social change (Kriesberg, 1998). Therefore, it is essential to understand the basic processes of conflict so that we can work to maximize productive outcomes and minimize destructive ones.

Conflict can occur at a number of levels of human functioning. Conflict in your head between opposing motives or ideas is shown by your "internal dialogue" and is at the intrapersonal level. Beyond that, the primary concern here is with social conflict, i.e., conflict between people whether they are acting as individuals, as members of groups, or as representatives of organizations or nations. Interpersonal conflict occurs when two people have incompatible needs, goals, or approaches in their relationship. Communication breakdown is often an important source of interpersonal conflict and learning communication skills is valuable in preventing and resolving such difficulties. At the same time, very real differences occur between people that cannot be resolved by any amount of improved communication. "Personality conflict" refers to very strong differences in motives, values or styles in dealing with people that are not resolvable. For example, if both parties in a relationship have a high need for power and both want to be dominant in the relationship, there is no way for both to be satisfied, and a power struggle ensues.

Barnes (1999) states that in the past decade the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) movement has matured with the emergence of newer types of conflict resolution methods especially on campuses. There are offices, campus judicial systems, peace counseling, peer mediation and other varieties. Among the conflict resolution methods available, according to Rajani (2009) was Ombudsman Institution which has been closely associated with democracy,democratic development, governance and public administration in contemporary world. It is viewed as an easy mechanism of grievance reprisal in the hands of common people against the power, discretion of the government and bureaucracy. In view of the aforementioned, thegovernment therefore, cannot afford to disregard the feelings of their citizens. It is therefore imperative for the civilised human society to set up stable, effective and trustworthy institutions to serve the people in various ways and in a timely manner.

In the modern world, an Ombudsman was first established in 1809 in Sweden. According to Walters (2001), the meaning of the word Ombudsman is derived from the old Nordic or Scandinavian languages which literally mean "representative". In 1919, more than a century after Sweden appointed an Ombudsman, another Scandinavian country, Finland, adopted theSwedish model for the redressal of public grievances against agencies of state. The next country to follow was Denmark which happened more recently in 1955. Walters (2001) further states that the first country outside Europe to establish such an office was New Zealand.

A study carried out between September and December 1988 by Daisy de Asper Y Valdles listed 136 Ombudsman offices around the world. The comparative analysis involved seventy-seven offices

including six in Scandinavian countries, twenty-four in the commonwealth, thirteen in Europe and ten in the United States, as well as twelve in the so-called under- developed countries and twelve American 'executive' Ombudsmen. Reif (2004) submits that offices of Classic Ombudsmen have developed with little sense of uniformity. As a result, thishas given rise to a wildering array of responsibilities.

In view of the complex nature of a university system, this could be likened to that of a nation.It is therefore imperative that collective bargaining had been a major instrument adopted in theUniversity system at resolving complaints and disputes. Therefore, this study is intended to look at the place of collective bargaining and Ombudsman in the Nigeria University System and develop a mechanism for its implementation.

Statement of the Problem

The settling of academic disputes by universities alone has always been a difficult process. Academic institutions are known for their internal disputes. Sometimes the disputes are aboutserious matters. It is not universally true, that the reason academics quarrel so bitterly is because so little is at stake. Some are so tough that strikes eventually take the toll on academiclife.

In view of the complex nature of a university system, it is therefore imperative that the University system cannot adopt only collective bargaining as a means of has its own ombudsman structure which handles all complaints in relation to the aforementioned types ofcomplaints handled by the nations Ombudsman. Therefore, this study is intended to look at the place of Ombudsman in the Nigeria University System and develop a mechanism for its implementation.

Research Questions

i. What is the perception of the sampled university staff (Teaching and nonteaching)and students about the complaint handling in their institutions?
ii. What is the perception of staff (Teaching and non-teaching) and students about thecomposition of the complaints handling unit in the sampled Universities?

Methodology

Descriptive design method was adopted in this study with all Academic and Non-Teaching staff of the public Universities in Nigeria as target population. One thousand two hundred participants were randomly selected. The instruments used for the study included Academic Staff Complaints Satisfactory Questionnaire (ASCSQ) and Non-Academic Staff Complaints Satisfactory Questionnaire (NASCS). Out of 1200 copies of questionnaire that were administered in the sampled universities, the totals of 1198 valid responses were retrieved. The data collected were coded and subjected to statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the research questions. The results were expressed inform of frequency counts, simplepercentages, mean and standard deviation. The weighted mean of each of the section in the questionnaires were also estimated for the conclusion about the respondents' perception on theconstruct in concern.

Results and Discussions

Research Question One: What is the perception of academic staff/students about complaints handling in their institutions?

Table 1: Perception of the Academic Staff Respondents about Complaints Handling in their Institutions

Description	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	STD
There is wide spread Manner ofHandling complaints in your institution.	151 50.3%	88 29.3%	61 20.3%	0 0.0%	3.30	.95
My institution is aware of Public Complaints Commission directive requirements.	146 48.7%	85 28.3%	69 23.0%	0 0.0%	3.26	.95
My institution is aware of the benefit of proper handling of complaints.	60 20.0%	0 0.0%	139 46.3%	101 33.7%	2.26	.97
This institution upholds general Complaints to any extent.	64 21.3%	0 0.0%	135 45.0%	101 33.7%	2.24	1.50
Members of this academic communityincluding myself knows where complaints are to be lodged in this institution.	116 38.7%	116 38.7%	68 22.7%	0. 0.0%	3.16	1.01
The institution has enough facilities to redress complaints.	75 25.0%	11 3.7%	146 48.7%	68 22.7%	2.16	1.00
There are complaints Management policies in this institution	110 36.7%	127 42.3%	63 21.0%	0 0.0%	3.16	.96
This institution is Complaint friendly	76 25.3%	0 0.0%	119 39.7%	105 35.0%	2.14	.85
Methodical Handling of Complaints is evident in the way this institution handles complaints	76 25.3%	8 2.7%	119 39.7%	97 32.3%	2.14	.92
Weighted Mean					**2.84**	**0.84**

Table 1 above presents the result of the perception of academic staff about the complaints handling in their institution, the result reveals that 79.6% of the respondents agreed that thereis wide spread of Manner of Handling complaints while 20.4% disagreed (mean=3.30, SD=0.92). Again, 77.0% of the respondents agreed that their institution is aware of PCCD requirements while 23.0% disagreed (mean=3.26, SD=0.95). More so, 20.0% of the academic respondent agreed that their institution is aware of Benefit of Proper handling of Complaints while 80.0% disagreed (mean=2.26, SD=0.79). Furthermore 21.3% of the respondents agreed that their institution upholding of complaints to any extent while 78.7%disagreed (mean=2.24, SD=1.50). Again, 71.4% of the respondents agreed that there is availability of appropriate remedy in the institution (mean=3.16, SD=1.00). Also 79.0% of the respondents agreed that there is complaints Management policies and procedure that arein place in their institution while 21.0% disagreed (mean=3.16, SD=0.96). In addition, 25.3% 74.7% agreed that their institution has Complaints friendly Culture of the institutionwhile 74.7% disagreed (mean=2.14, SD=0.92). Hence, it could be inferred that sampled institutions have no complain friendly policy.

Table 2: Perception of the Non-Academic Respondents about Complaints Handling in their Institutions

Description	*SA*	*A*	*D*	*SD*	*Mean*	STD
There is wide spread Manner of Handling institution complaints in your	84 28.0%	5 1.7%	107 35.7%	104 34.7%	2.31	0.4
My Institution is aware of Public Complaints Commission Directive requirements	146 48.7%	93 31.0%	61 20.3%	0 0.0%	3.28	0.41
My institution is aware of the benefitof proper handling of complaints	147 48.0%	88 29.3%	62 20.7%	3 1.0%	3.26	0.23

This institution upholds general complaints to any extent	64 • 21.3%	2 0.7%	143 47.7%	91 30.3%	2.25	0.51
Members of this academic community including myself knows where complaints are to be lodged in this institution	141 47.0%	88 29.3%	69 23.0%	2 0.7%	3.23	0.56
The institution has enough facilities to redress complaints	66 22.0%	135 45.0%	97 32.3%	2 0.7	2.22	0.12
There are complaints Managementpolicies in this institution	73 24.3%	135 45.%	88 29.3%	4 1.3%	2.18	0.3
This institution is Complaint friendly	67 22.3%	11 33.7%	114 38%	108 36.0%	2.08	.35
Methodical Handling of Complaints isevident in the way this institution handles complaints	108 36.0%	109 36.3%	71 23.7%	12 4.0%	3.04	0.12
Weighted Mean					2.75	0.37

Table 2 shows the distribution of non-academic staff responses on their perception on the way the complaint is being handle in their institution. The result reveals that 70.4% of the respondents agreed that there is wide spread of Manner of Handling complaints in their institution while 29.6% disagreed (mean=3.31, SD=0.4). Again, 79.8% of the respondents agreed that their institution is aware of PCCD requirements while 20.2% disagreed (mean=3.28, SD=0.41). Also, 77.7% of the non-academic staff agreed that their institution isaware of Benefit of Proper handling of Complaints while 22.3% disagreed (mean=3.26, SD=0.23). More so, 22.0% of the non-teaching staff also agreed that their institution upholding of complaints to some extent while 78.0% disagreed (mean=2.25, SD=0.51). Furthermore, 84.0% of the respondents agreed that knowledge of Complaints lodgment center by everyone (mean=3.23, SD=0.12). 23.0% of the respondents agreed that there is availabilityof appropriate remedy in their institution while 77.0% disagreed (mean=2.22, SD=0.12). In the same vein, 12.7% of the respondents agreed that there is complains Management policiesand procedure are in place in their institution while 87.3% disagreed (mean=2.18, SD=0.3).

From the result, it could be observed that sample respondents in the southwest universities agreed to a large extent. Hence inference could be made that the staff in the sample universitiesare aware of where complaints could be lodge but the manner and procedures of handling complaints could be said to be redundant or skewed.

This table reveals the rating of the factors that determines the perception of students about complaints handling in Nigerian universities. The mean item scores showed that the studentsagreed that the entire nine factors pointed towards a poor perception of the students towards complaints handling in the Nigerian universities. Spread of manner of handling complaints was rated highest (Mean) = 3.38, SD=0.56). This is followed by benefit of proper handling (Mean = 3.26, SD=0.4), lodgment center (MIS=3.25, SD=0.56); methodology (Mean = 3.23,SD=0.21); extent of upholding complaints (Mean = 3.18, SD=1.2); culture (Mean = 2.11, SD=1.3); awareness of complaints directives (Mean = 3.06); appropriate remedy (Mean = 2.04, SD=0.34); and lastly, availability of policies and procedure (Mean = 3.16, SD=0.21). Thus, it could be said that students also agreed that their universities have no complaint friendly culture and lacks methodical ways of handling complaints.

Research Question Two: What is the perception of staff and students about the composition ofthe complaints handling unit of the University?

Table 3: Perception of the Academic Staff about Dispute Handlers in their Institutions

Description	*SA*	*A*	*D*	*SD*	*Mean*	STD
Adequacy of delegation of disputeresolution	61 20.3%	0 0.0%	151 50.3%	88 29.3%	2.30	0.02
Consideration of complainants in resolution process	133 44.3%	109 36.3%	58 19.3%	0 0.0%	3.25	0.34
Management acceptance and utilization of handlers' resolution	62 20.7%	0 0.0%	113 37.3%	125 41.7%	2.17	0.56
Task orientation of complaints handlers	73 24.3%	0 0.0%	120 40.0%	107 35.7%	2.16	0.4
Human and Task orientation of complaints handler	71 23.7%	21 7.0%	146 48.7%	62 20.7%	2.11	0.61
Human orientation of complaints handlers	71 23.7%	10 3.3%	112 37.3%	107 35.6%	2.07	0.3
Weighted Mean					**2.34**	**0.37**

This table reveals the rating of the factors that determines the perception of the academic staffabout dispute handlers in their institutions. The mean item scores explained the perception of the academic staff towards complaints handlers in the Nigerian universities using the entire sixfactors. Adequate delegation was rated highest with 79.5% of the respondents agreed that thereis adequacy of delegation of dispute resolution (Mean = 3.30, SD=0.02). This is followed by resolution process (Mean= 2.25, SD=0.34), acceptance and utilization (Mean = 2.17, SD=0.56); task orientation (Mean = 2.16, SD=0.4); human and task orientation (Mean = 2.11,SD=0.61); and lastly, human orientation (Mean = 2.07, SD=0.3). From the result, it could observe that academic staff in the sampled Universities perceived that composition of complaint management personnel is inadequate.

Table 4: Perception of the Non-Academic Staff about Dispute Handlers in their Institutions

Description	*SA*	*A*	*D*	*SD*	*Mean*	Std
Human orientation of complaints handlers	144 48.0%	95 31.7%	61 20.3%	0 0.0%	3.28	1.00
Management acceptance andutilization of handlers' resolution	63 21.0%	0 0.0%	132 44.0%	105 35.0%	2.17	.98
Consideration of complainants in resolution process	77. 25.7%	10 '3.3%	146 48.7%	67 22.3%	2.16	0.85
Adequacy of delegation of disputeresolution	64 21.3%	9 3.3%	119 39.7%	108 36.0%	2.12	1.00
Human and Task orientation of complaints handler	121 40.3%	98 32.7%	73 24.3%	*8* 2.7%	3.11	0.50
Task orientation of complaints handlers	108 36.6%	109 36.3%	71 23.7%	12 4.0%	3.04	0.17
Weighted Mean					**2.64**	**0.75**

This table reveals the rating of the factors that determines the perception of the non-academicstaff about dispute handlers in their institutions. The mean item scores explained the perceptionof the non-academic staff towards complaints handlers in the Nigerian universities using the entire six factors. Human orientation was rated highest (Mean = 3.28, SD=1.00). This is followed by acceptance and utilization (Mean = 2.17, SD=0.98); resolution process (Mean = 3.16, SD=0.85); adequate delegation (Mean = 2.12, SD=1.00); human and task orientation (Mean = 2.11, SD=1.00) and lastly, task orientation (Mean = 2.04, SD=0.17). The general, implication of the result is that the resolution of

the complaint handlers are not being taken into consideration by the management and that the delegation of dispute resolution is inadequate.

This table reveals the rating of the factors that determines the perception of the students aboutdispute handlers in their institutions. The mean item scores explained the perception of the students towards complaints handlers in the Nigerian universities using the entire six indictors. Human and task orientation was rated highest (Mean = 3.15, SD=0.65), Adequate delegation (Mean = 2.26, SD=0.23). This is followed by resolution process (Mean = 2.23, SD=0.46), human orientation (Mean = 2.23, SD= 0.12); acceptance and utilization (Mean = 2.22,SDK).65); and lastly task orientation (Mean = 2.03, SD=0.2l). From the result, it could be deduced that students' perception of the complaint handlers is that they are not up to the task as failed to be functional in the above listed responsibilities.

Summary of the Findings

The investigation revealed that wide spread manner of Handling complaints, Institution's awareness of complaints handling requirements, institutions awareness of benefit of proper handling of complaints, knowledge of complaints lodgment centre and availability of appropriate remedy in the institution were found to be the factors responsible for success of Ombudsman in resolutions of dispute in the institutions. Others are complaints management policies, and procedures, complaints friendly culture and methodical of complaints handling also predict conflict resolution. Adequacy of delegation of dispute resolution, consideration ofcomplaints in resolution process, management acceptance and utilization of handlers, task orientation of complaints handler and human orientation of handlers were found to bedeterminants of dispute handling in Nigerian universities.

On the aggregate, the findings regarding dispute handling revealed that manner of Handling complaints, Institution's awareness of complaints handling requirements, institutions awareness of benefit of proper handling of complaints, knowledge of complaints lodgment centre and availability of appropriate remedy have significant relative contributions to effective dispute resolution in Nigerian universities when considered together. This should becombined with complaints management policies, and procedures, complaints friendly cultureand methodical of complaints handling for improving dispute resolution in Nigerian universities. In addition, delegation of dispute resolution, consideration of complaints in resolution process, management acceptance and utilization of handlers, task orientation of complaints handler and human orientation of handlers were other features of dispute handlersin organisations.

Conclusion

Findings from this study revealed that wide spread manner of Handling complaints, Institution's awareness of complaints handling requirements, institutions awareness of benefitof proper handling of complaints, knowledge of complaints lodgment centre and availabilityof appropriate remedy are all factors responsible for the simplicity of resolutions of dispute inthe institutions. Also, dispute handling revealed that manner of Handling complaints, Institution's awareness of complaints handling requirements, institutions awareness of benefit of proper handling of complaints, knowledge of complaints lodgment centre and availability of appropriate remedy have significant relative contributions to effective dispute resolution inNigerian universities.

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