

Full Length Research Paper

Managing and Addressing Conflicts in Secular and Non-Secular Tertiary Institutions of South West Nigeria

Joseph Babatola Ayodele and Joseph Olukayode Adewumi

Department of Educational Foundations and Management, Faculty of Education, University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria
Department of Christian Religious Education, Baptist College of Theology, Igede-Ekiti, Nigeria.

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This paper compared the incidence and management of conflicts in secular and non-secular tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The sample of this study was made of sixty staff, and two hundred and forty students randomly selected each from two secular and two non-secular tertiary institutions in south western Nigeria. A validated questionnaire was designed and administered to collect data on the occurrence of conflict and conflict management strategies. Data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and percentage. In addition, t-test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that conflict is common to both secular and non-secular tertiary institutions. The study however revealed that the level of occurrence of conflict is low in the two types of institutions. It was also revealed that there is no significant difference in the conflict management strategies adopted by authorities of both secular and non-secular tertiary institutions. In addition, the study revealed that the conflict management strategies adopted by authorities of both secular and non-secular tertiary institutions are significantly related to their effectiveness. Based on the findings, it was recommended that authorities need to give prompt attention to addressing causes of conflicts. The use of dialogue in resolving conflicts should be embraced. In addition, all stakeholders in tertiary institutions are encouraged to employ religious exercises for divine intervention to reduce the emergence of conflict or for resolving existing conflicts.

Key words: Conflict, occurrence of conflict, conflict management, secular tertiary institutions, non-secular tertiary institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Human life is characterized by social relations of dependence and inter-dependence. As social beings, human beings construct, maintain and change the social world within which they live. This process is better enhanced by human beings coming together under the umbrella of one organization or the other. In such organizations, the possibility of relatedness between humans is guaranteed. However, since each individual is unique and different from others in an organization, differences cannot be totally suppressed from manifesting. When differences come to the fore, collisions, strives, controversies, dis-

ords, frictions and disagreements cannot be avoided. These are evidences of conflicts. This phenomenon informed the submission of Akomolafe (2002), that conflict is unavoidable in any organization. Ajayi and Ayodele (2002) believed that conflict is inevitable, while Gillin (2004) submitted that conflict is a normal part of man's social relations. Conflict is described to be as common as laughter. No human organization is thus immune to conflicts. Human beings are the same everywhere, either at home, church, school, the work place, the open market or in any other social institution.

Institutions of learning, both secular and non-secular, are perfectly qualified to be regarded as organizations in all respects. Secular tertiary institutions have very prominent roles to play in the nation's overall development.

*Corresponding author. E-mail: tolayodele@yahoo.co.uk

These institutions of higher learning are established for the purpose of training and providing the nation with the middle and high level manpower it needs to attain the national goals. Such institutions include Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, and Colleges of Technology. On the other hand, non-secular tertiary institutions are religious degree awarding institutions. These are established by various Christian denominations with the goal of training religious leaders for the work of the church. Such institutions include Seminaries, Colleges of Theology, Bible Colleges, Schools of Divinity and Schools of Ministry.

Findings from researches carried out on conflict management in secular institutions show that conflicts have continued to be a common phenomenon in secular institutions. Garba et al. (2001) submitted that conflict, especially in Nigerian universities, is not a new development, but that it only became more frequent, more intense and of a much wider scope and of longer duration in the 1990s compared to the pre 1970s. Many reasons could be adduced for the increase in the level of occurrence of conflicts in recent times when compared to some years back. These include undue interference of government in the administration of tertiary institutions, and the disparity in the conditions of service in tertiary institutions.

Onyeonoru and Bankole (2002) have however identified the antagonistic relationship between Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and government as the major root of the numerous conflicts evolving from Nigerian Universities. Such conflicts were said to have occurred at the national level among others in 1980, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2001. Garba et al. (2001) presented that conflicts between students and authorities accounted for 75% of total conflicts in Lagos State University (LASU) and University of Lagos (UNILAG), 100% in University of Nigeria, Nsukka and 30.08% in University of Ibadan. Next is conflict between ASUU and Authorities: 40% in University of Abuja, 30.08% in Ibadan and 26.12% in Zaria. Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) accounted for 25% of conflicts in UNILAG, 30.08% in Ibadan and 43.4% in Zaria.

Statistics as to the incidence of conflicts and their management seems to be scarce in non-secular tertiary institutions. This is because of the peculiarity of such institutions coupled with the sacredness of the oath of secrecy which is usually administered by actors in such institutions. Many people thus believed that non-secular institutions should be conflict free. This belief has given impetus to this study. There are divergent opinions on the impact of conflicts on any organization. Some researchers believed that conflict is essential for group formation and for progress. However, Fisher (1974) viewed conflict as destructive and the most intractable social issue in any institution. Adetunji (2005) described conflict as evil. Oyebade (2000) described conflict as a peculiar form of sickness. While Madubuke (2000) is of the opinion that the consequences of conflict on

institutions of learning is better imagined than explained, especially when conflict is allowed to transform to crisis. Crisis has been identified as one of the banes of effective management of educational institutions. Therefore, if conflict is to be minimized, the need for effective conflict management cannot be over emphasized.

Suffice it to say that despite the avalanche of recommendations from the numerous studies already carried out by researchers on conflict and its management in tertiary institutions, this particular sector of the Nigerian education industry has continued to be inundated with many conflicts. It is pertinent to state however, that most of the studies done on conflict management in tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been limited to secular tertiary institutions. While admitting that the purpose for establishing non-secular tertiary institutions may be different from those of secular tertiary institutions, yet as far as both types of institutions are made up of human beings, who to a large extent are citizens of the same country, the dire need for giving unbiased attention to a subject that is of mutual interest to both cannot be over emphasized.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

It is against the above background that this study is focused on comparing the incidence and management of conflict in secular and non-secular tertiary institutions in South West Nigeria. The comparative study will be done vis-à-vis the occurrence of conflicts, the conflict management strategies adopted by authorities and the effectiveness of such conflict management strategies. It is hoped that this paper would be useful to administrators of tertiary institutions, staff and students in providing useful insight on appropriate approaches to conflicts and how best to handle such in their respective institutions. This knowledge is considered essential in order to foster peaceful and conducive atmosphere for teaching-learning.

Research questions

Specifically, the study addressed the following questions:

1. What is the level of the occurrence of conflict in secular and non-secular tertiary institutions in Nigeria?
2. What are the conflict management strategies adopted by authorities of secular and non-secular tertiary institutions in Nigeria?
3. How effective are the management strategies in resolving conflicts in secular and non-secular tertiary institutions in Nigeria?

Research hypotheses

On the basis of the research questions, the following hypotheses have been raised:

Table 1. Level of the occurrence of conflicts in secular and non-secular tertiary institutions.

AREAS OF CONFLICT	Non-secular				secular			
	High		Low		High		Low	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Among Students	71	23.7	229	76.3	59	19.7	241	80.3
Between students and institution's authority	74	24.7	226	75.3	122	40.7	178	59.3
Among staff	45	15.0	255	85.0	29	9.7	271	90.3
Between staff and institution's authority	54	18.0	246	82.0	89	29.7	211	70.3
Between students and staff	22	7.3	278	92.7	17	5.7	283	94.3
Average	53	17.7	247	82.3	63	21.1	237	78.9

1. There is no significant difference in the level of occurrence of conflict between secular and non-secular tertiary institutions in Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference between the management strategies adopted by authorities of secular and non-secular tertiary institutions in Nigeria.
3. There is no significant relationship between the conflict management strategies employed by authorities of non-secular tertiary institutions and their effectiveness.
4. There is no significant relationship between the conflict management strategies employed by school authorities and their effectiveness in secular tertiary institutions.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive research design of the survey type to investigate and compare the perception of students and staff of secular and non-secular tertiary institutions on the incidence, management strategies of conflicts and the effectiveness of such conflict management strategies in their respective institutions.

The population of the study consisted of all staff and students of the secular and non-secular tertiary institutions in South West Nigeria. There are twelve secular and seven non-secular tertiary institutions in the study area. The stratified random sampling technique was adopted in this study. The two strata are: secular and non-secular institutions. Simple random sampling technique was used to select sixty staff and two hundred and forty students from two purposely selected secular tertiary institutions. Sixty staff and two hundred and forty students from two purposely selected non-secular tertiary institutions were also used in the study. The schools purposely selected tertiary institutions were considered similar in their characteristics with respect to type of institution. A questionnaire "Conflict Management in Secular and Non-Secular Tertiary Institutions Questionnaire" (CMSNTIQ) was designed for the study. It was used to obtain data from respondents on the occurrence of conflicts as well as conflict management strategies. The research instrument was validated by experts in Tests and Measurement and Educational Management before administration. The test-re-test method was used to determine the instrument's reliability. A reliability coefficient of 0.7 was obtained through the use of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The data collected were analyzed by using frequency counts and percentage scores. In addition, t-test statistic and Pearson Product Moment Correlation

methods were used to test the hypotheses raised at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question one: What is level of the occurrence of conflicts in secular and non-secular tertiary institutions in Nigeria?

It could be observed that the frequencies of conflicts were scored low in all five areas by majority of respondents from both secular and non-secular tertiary institutions. In non-secular tertiary institutions, 23.7% of respondents agree that the level of conflicts among students is high, while 15.0% of respondents believe conflict among staff is high. Also, 75.3% of respondents agree that conflicts between students and institutions authority is low. In the same vein, 82.0% of respondents believe that the level of occurrence of conflicts between staff and institutions authorities is low, while 92.7% agree that the level of occurrence of conflicts between students and staff is low in their institutions.

In the same vein, findings from secular tertiary institutions show that 80.3% of respondents agree that the level of occurrence of conflicts among students is low. 59.3% of respondents believe that the level of conflicts between students and institutions authorities is low, while the level of occurrence of conflicts between staff and institutions authorities is considered to be low by 70.3% of respondents. Conflicts among staff is considered to be low in secular tertiary institutions as a majority of 90.3% of respondents subscribe to this view, just as 94.3% of respondents agree that the level of occurrence of conflicts between students and staff is low. On the average, 17.7% and 21.1% of the respondents expressed that there existed high level of conflict in non-secular and secular tertiary institutions, respectively. This finding thus shows that the level of occurrence of conflicts is considered to be low in secular and non-secular institutions.

Table 2. Conflict management strategies adopted by institutions' authorities.

Conflict management strategies	Non-secular				Secular			
	Agreed		Disagreed		Agreed		Disagreed	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq	%	Freq.	%
Compromise/Dialogue	262	87.2	38	12.3	258	86.1	42	13.9
Problem Solving	212	70.7	88	29.3	218	72.8	82	27.2
Avoidance/Preventive	266	88.7	34	11.3	236	78.6	64	21.4
Delay/Negligence	56	18.9	244	81.1	77	25.8	223	74.2
Autocratic/Forcing	75	24.8	225	75.2	87	28.9	213	71.1
Religious Exercise	253	84.4	47	15.6	248	82.7	52	17.3

Table 3. Effectiveness of conflict management strategies adopted by authorities of institutions

ITEMS	Non-secular				Secular			
	Agreed		Disagreed		Agreed		Disagreed	
	Freq	%	Freq.	%	Freq	%	Freq.	%
Authorities failed in the way conflict had been managed	168	56.0	132	44.0	206	68.7	94	31.3
Authorities had allowed conflicts to degenerate to crises in the way they had been managed	133	44.4	167	55.6	164	54.6	136	45.4
Authorities had been estranged after each conflict	130	43.3	170	56.7	139	46.3	161	53.7
One conflict had always led to another	169	56.3	131	43.7	182	60.7	118	39.3
Better alternative strategies could have been used	206	68.6	94	31.4	216	72.0	84	28.0
Average	161	53.7	139	46.3	181	60.3	119	39.7

Research Question Two: What are the conflict management strategies adopted by authorities of secular and non-secular tertiary institutions in Nigeria?

It is observed in Table 2 that over 75% of respondents from secular and non-secular tertiary institutions agree that conflict management strategies such as Compromise /Dialogue, Avoidance/Preventive and religious exercises are frequently used in their respective institutions. While over 70% of respondents submit that Problem Solving is also a commonly used conflict management strategy in secular and non-secular tertiary institutions. The table also shows that less than 25% of respondents agreed that delay/negligence and autocratic/forcing were adopted by school authorities to manage conflicts. From the table, therefore, the most commonly used conflict management strategies are avoidance/preventing, compromise /dialogue, religious exercise and problem solving. In addition, the table shows that the least commonly used conflict management strategies are delay/negligence and autocratic/forcing. The study, however, revealed that conflict management strategies employed by secular and non-secular tertiary institutions are similar.

Research Question Three: How effective are the management strategies in resolving conflicts in secular and non-secular tertiary institutions in Nigeria?

Table 3 shows that 56.0% of respondents in non-secular, and 68.7% in secular tertiary institutions agree that authorities in their respective institutions had failed in the way conflict had been managed. 56.3% of respondents in non-secular and 60.2 % of respondents in secular tertiary institutions believe that one conflict had always led to another. It is believed by majority of respondents, 68.6% of respondents from non-secular and 72.0% from secular tertiary institutions that better alternative strategies could have been used. However, the degeneration of conflicts to crises in the way authorities had managed conflicts was identified by 54. 6% of the respondents in secular tertiary institutions. The study reveals that the opinions of respondents in both secular and non-secular tertiary institutions as regarding the effectiveness of conflict management strategies employed by authorities of their individual institution are not too different.

Table 4. T-test analysis of occurrence of conflict in secular and non-secular tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Group	N	X	SD	DF	t-Cal	t-table
Non-secular	300	5.87	1.12	598	1.800	1.960
Secular	300	6.053	1.15			

P > 0.05

Table 5. t-test statistic of management strategies adopted by authorities of secular and non-secular institution.

Group	N	X	SD	DF	t-Cal	t-table
Non-secular	300	37.35	5.62	598	.436	1.960
Secular	300	37.56	5.79			

P>0.05

Table 6. Pearson Product Moment Correlation of management strategies and their effectiveness in non-secular tertiary institutions.

Variable	N	X	SD	r-Cal	r-table
Management Strategies	300	37.35	5.62	.407	.195
Effectiveness of Strategies	300	15.49	3.31		

P>0.05

Hypothesis one: There is no significant difference between the level of occurrence of conflict between secular and non-secular tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Table 4 shows that the t-cal (1.800) is less than t-table (1.960). Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This implies that the level of occurrence of conflict between secular institutions is not significantly different from that of non-secular tertiary institutions

Hypothesis two: There is no significant difference between the management strategies adopted by authorities of secular and non-secular tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Table 5 reveals that t-cal (.436) is less than t-table (1.960). Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This implies that there is no significant difference in the conflict management strategies adopted by authorities of both secular and non- secular tertiary institutions in resolving conflicts in their respective institutions.

Hypothesis three: There is no significant relationship between the conflict management strategies employed by authorities of non-secular tertiary institutions and their effectiveness. Table 6 shows that r-cal (.407) is greater than r-table (.195), thus the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that management strategies adopted by authorities of non- secular tertiary institutions are significantly related to their effectiveness.

Hypothesis four: There is no significant relationship between the conflict management strategies employed by authorities of secular tertiary institutions and their effectiveness. Table 7 shows that r-cal (.486) is greater than r-table (.195). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that management strategies employed by authorities of secular tertiary institutions are significantly related to their effectiveness.

DISCUSSION

The study reveals that conflicts occur in both secular and non-secular tertiary institutions. This finding confirms the position of researchers that conflict is either unavoidable or inevitable in any organization. The study however reveals that the level of occurrence of conflicts in both secular and non-secular tertiary institutions is generally low. Also, the finding of the study also shows that there is no significant difference in the level of occurrence of conflicts between secular and non-secular tertiary institutions. This finding negates the popular belief of some people who expect non-secular institutions to be devoid of conflicts which they believe are normal features in secular institutions. In the same vein, the finding falls short of the stated goals and commitment of non- secular tertiary institutions as stated in the Charter of the Baptist College of Theology, Igede-Ekiti (2005) to harmonious

Table 7. Pearson Product Moment Correlation of management strategies and their effectiveness in secular tertiary institutions.

Variable	N	X	SD	r-Cal	r-table
Management Strategies	300	37.56	5.79	.486	.195
Effectiveness of Strategies	300	16.08	3.05		

P<0.05

living, tolerance and of being good role models. This researcher is however of the opinion that the finding is a confirmation of the fact that human beings are the same, either in secular or non-secular institutions.

The study further shows that there is no significant difference in the conflicts management strategies employed by authorities of both secular and non-secular tertiary institutions. The findings reveal that authorities of both secular and non-secular tertiary institutions employed some conflict management strategies, which include compromise/dialogue, problem-solving, avoidance/preventive and resorting to religious exercises to manage or resolve conflicts in their respective institutions. It is also noted that over two-thirds of respondents from both secular and non-secular tertiary institutions agree that autocracy and negligence are not commonly adopted as conflict management strategies in their respective institutions. The low level usage of the delay/negligence approach agrees with the position of Ajayi and Ayodele (2002), as they call the attention of managers to the danger inherent in delaying action on conflict resolution. Furthermore, it is observed that majority of respondents from both categories of institutions agree that conflicts management strategies employed by authorities of their various institutions had been less effective in curtailing the emergence or of resolving conflicts. The findings show that the emergence of conflict may be difficult to manage; this may especially be due to the undeniable individual differences that might be occasionally manifesting within an organization. Also, most of the conflict management strategies might have already been overused that such could have lost their potency. And drawing inference from the submission of most respondents in both secular and non-secular tertiary institutions, the need for researchers to come out with other better strategies for conflicts management in secular and non-secular tertiary institutions cannot be over emphasized.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Findings from this study showed that conflict is not only limited to secular institutions. In addition, the conflict management strategies employed by both secular and non-secular tertiary institutions are similar. The study also showed that the most commonly used conflict management strategies are avoidance/preventive, compromise /

dialogue, religious exercise and problem solving. The study also showed that conflict management strategies are significantly related to their effectiveness in both secular and non-secular tertiary institutions. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made for better management of conflicts in secular and non-secular tertiary institutions.

1. The use of dialogue in managing conflicts should be embraced in both secular and non-secular tertiary institutions.
2. There is need for authorities of institutions to carefully study the causes of conflicts in their respective institutions and to adopt appropriate conflict management strategies to enhance effective and maximum results.
3. The authorities of secular tertiary institutions need to be proactive in their approach to conflict management. This is more important in view of the numerous negative effects which conflicts may have on such institutions.
4. There is need for stakeholders in secular tertiary institutions to be willing to shift ground on some demands, instead of the practice of 'fighting to the end'. This calls for a little bit of compromise and dialogue from both sides in conflict, in the spirit of give and take.
5. There is need for owner agencies and authorities of non-secular tertiary institutions to reduce their 'thought-control' disposition. This will enhance greater freedom of self-expression by staff and students.
6. It is necessary for authorities to address themselves to how they can curtail the emergence of conflicts rather than concentrating on how to manage conflicts in their respective institutions.
7. There is need to employ religious exercises as conflict management strategy more often in secular tertiary institutions. This is essential to minimize the adverse effects that conflicts could have on such institutions.

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