

Organisational Structure And Conflict Resolution In Nigerian University

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Abstract

In spite of tough measures adopted by university authorities and government to manage conflicts on campuses, the conflicts continue to occur. This paper therefore, attempts to examine the organizational structure and communication in relation to conflict resolution in Nigerian universities. The paper concludes that ineffective use of committee system and poor communication system have largely contributed to the adoption of ineffective administrative measures to manage crises, hence, the re-occurrence of such crises. It is therefore, recommended that finding a lasting solution to campus conflicts should not be a matter of patching up things but should involve the right use of committee system and effective communication strategies.

Keywords: *University, Conflict, Communication, Committee System, Union, Vice-Chancellor.*

1.0 Introduction

In the post-independence era, the development of university education in Nigeria closely followed the evolution of the country from the debris of colonialism, its crisis of underdevelopment and its current transition into corporate, globalised capitalism with its attendant rupture of the general principles of the welfare state. This schema involves a disorderly oscillation between the developmentalist and the entrepreneurial path in the evolution and growth of universities (Abubakar, 2005). In the first place, universities were created to produce manpower for development in an essentially state regulated economy in which government has been an active player. The guiding principle in this project was the training of persons to acquire the requisite knowledge, leadership skill and commitment to national development, integration and liberal humanism.

2.0 Structure of Nigerian University

In Nigeria, the main features of a university's organization are usually laid down in the law establishing the university. The provisions of the law are explained and enlarged upon in the statutes. The law and the statutes together establish the framework within which the university is to be governed.

Each university law and statute establishes a number of authorities and offices, but the overall management responsibilities are allocated to three of them: the Council, the Senate and the Vice-Chancellor, each with a defined sphere of responsibilities. Most of the other organs and officers of the university are subordinate to them; this does

not however, apply to the offices of Visitor and Chancellor whose powers are limited to certain special circumstances and are not involved in the normal functioning or operations of the University (Aliu, 2001).

The Visitor symbolizes the proprietor of the university. In the case of federal universities, the visitor is the Head of State or Head of Government, in the case of state universities, it is the state governor while the proprietor is usually the visitor of a private university. The Visitor appoints the Vice-Chancellor on the recommendation of the university governing council (but in the case of federal universities this power has been delegated to the governing council). He probes into, through visitation or probe panel, and corrects any irregularities that may arise in the university. In the event of any doubt or dispute arising at any time regarding discipline or the meaning of any provisions of the university law or statutes, the matter may be referred to the Visitor for final adjudication (Aliu, 2001).

The Chancellor is the highest principal officer of the university. He presides at convocation ceremonies and other assemblies of the university, the conferment of degrees, diplomas, certificates and other awards of the university.

The council has the overall responsibility for policy-making and operations of the university including matters of finance, staff condition of service and discipline, the property of the university, building facilities and material provisions for students.

The Pro-Chancellor, as Chairman of the university governing council, is expected to be a knowledgeable

person, of high integrity and should have a wealth of experience, able to guide the institution towards full and continued development. The members of the council are drawn from the university community, government, alumni and the general public and the members should be experienced persons of untainted integrity, courage and stature who would inspire confidence and bring their experience to bear on the management of the institution.

The senate, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, is responsible for all the academic affairs of the university, including the provision of courses and the approval of their syllabuses; the administration and progress of students through examination and otherwise. In carrying out these functions, it requires the concurrence of council to provide the necessary financial and other resources. Senate should be a relatively large, deliberative and participative body made up of academic staff members. The non-professional members elected by the congregation should be broadly representative of faculty interests and varied experience within the university.

The great asset of any university is its students and alumni, and its reputation to a large extent depends on the performance of these students and alumni in and outside the university environment. The convocation, comprising the principal officers, teachers and alumni of the university is a forum for interaction between the university and its alumni. It serves as a platform for promoting a strong alumni association, and for appointing a member of the university governing council. The university therefore, maintains an alumni office, keeps a register of its alumni as prescribed by the university law, up-dates their contact addresses, and keeps them informed about goals and achievements of their alma mater. In return, the university explores the potential benefit from organized alumni association in terms of financial and other support for continued development of the institution (Aliu, 2001).

The congregation, comprising staff members holding degrees, is a good platform for discussing matters of general interest relating to the well-being of the university, and for monitoring opinion on any issue affecting the university. It serves as an electoral college for electing some members of the council and senate.

The Vice-Chancellor is the executive and academic head of the university, the chief exponent of the educational mission of the university, the philosophy of education that underpins this mission, the goal sought, and the quality of performance that is required to attain those goals.

The Vice-Chancellor has specified authority to maintain the efficiency of and good order of the university with singular restraint. All the other officers of the administration are responsible to him but the administration as a whole is governed by the policy decision of council and senate and

the advice emanating from the committee system. The role of the Vice-Chancellor, therefore, is not that of a garrison commander or autocratic figure, but that of a coordinator and a strong image figure operating under a system of constraint and countervailing power. In fact, the Vice-Chancellor is like a prime minister. His success in managing the human, financial and material resources of the university depends not only upon his professional skills as an academic, but also on his ability to lead, motivate and inspire administrative associates, academic and non-academic staff as well as students to work towards the central purpose of the university to advance learning and enhance talent (Banjo, 2001). His interpersonal relations skills are usually put to test.

The title: "chief executive" is also, and perhaps even more widely used in reference to the Vice-Chancellor. However, it is worth noting that the two terms (executive head and chief executive) are not synonymous indeed, the use of one term or the other may influence a Vice-Chancellor's perception of his duties, functions and responsibilities. Within the context of the Association of Commonwealth Universities, to which all Nigerian universities belong, or should belong, the preferred term is executive head, which more accurately describes the role of the Vice-Chancellor as the head of his institution.

The distinction is important because the term chief executive is more commonly and more appropriately used in reference to profit-motivated organizations where the individual so referred to usually wields more executive powers than a Vice-Chancellor. While, it is true therefore, that Vice-Chancellors are expected to run their universities as efficiently as the managing director of private companies, it would be highly misleading for them to assume that they are to run the institution in the same manner as managing director. The university is a more democratic organization than a profit-motivated venture, and although the buck indeed stops with the Vice-Chancellor, the institution is run by committee system and under the general supervision of governing council. A Vice-Chancellor who tries to model himself on the managing director of company, or even worse, as a garrison commander, is likely to run into trouble, on the one hand, with colleagues who expect the institution to be run democratically, though no less firmly and on the other hand, possibly with the governing council (Banjo, 2001).

This shows the dilemma of a Vice-Chancellor's position, and his success depends on how effectively he operates the committee system to give effect to the mission of the university and to prevent arbitrary actions. Obviously, personal traits have much to do with this, but so also does a good understanding and correct perception by the Vice-

Chancellor of his proper duties, functions and responsibilities. He must give firm leadership, but must carry the university community along with him through the various committees. Given the exceptional nature of that community, this is by no means as easy task.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor, who is a nominee of the Vice-Chancellor, endorsed by the senate and confirmed by council, is assigned specific schedule of responsibility by the Vice Chancellor, such as to allow him to continue his teaching and research and even resource mobilization. The deputy vice-chancellor (Administration) is not expected to see the registrar as a rival.

The Registrar is the principal or chief administrative officer of the university. He is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the day-to-day administrative work-flow in the university and his effectiveness can be measured in terms of institutional goals and the extent to which these are met to the satisfaction of various constituencies. He plays a major role in policy implementation and operates within mandates and policies laid out by council, senate and other bodies, but without decision-making authority. He is secretary to council, senate, congregation and convocation, and sits in advisory capacity at all committees of council and senate as well as other administrative committees to guide on rules, regulations and university procedures. He is the custodian of university seal, other legal documents and records. He and his divisional heads are to see to it that the standard official university publications such as the university calendar, university prospectus, staff handbook, university gazette, handbook on administrative procedures, etc., are issued and updated on regular basis.

The Registrar's office with its division, sections et cetera, is responsible for the routine administration of the university except that bearing on financial matters and accounts. The Registry staff are responsible for the secretariat services of university committees, the implementation of their decisions and the collection, analysis and storage of relevant statistics and information. The administrative responsibilities of the Registrar's office with regards to academic work including providing staff or admission, registration and matriculation of students, examinations, academic transcripts, advertising for entry into degree and other courses, and the processing of academic appointments (Aliu, 2001).

The Bursar is the chief-financial officer of the university. He is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor in all matters relating to finance, in particular the disbursement of funds, financial accounting and treasury services, purchasing and contracts, superannuation, pensions, gratuity, loans and insurance as well as certain planning and budgeting activities. He and his senior professional staff are to see to it that financial regulations are made, published in Manual of Financial

procedures and followed to ensure efficient use of the funds allocated to or generated by the university.

The University Library is the academic heart of the university system. Its basic purpose is to provide students and academic staff members with material, assistance and an environment that facilitates teaching, learning and research. A well- quipped library is the fundamental need for the scholar, and the University Librarian is the academic head of the university library. He is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the development of the university library system. This includes the main university library, college, faculty and other unit libraries and departmental reading rooms (Aliu, 2001). Other departments include physical planning and development unit, directorate of academic planning and monitoring, faculties and academic departments.

The university as an academic community operates traditionally on the basis that the teaching and non-teachings staff as a whole as well as students do participate in the formulation of policies and decision making processes. Though provision is made through congregation and through staff and students unions for regular discussions and deliberations on the well-being of the university, in practice the normal operation of the university is carried out through committees.

University committees are established by the university law (statutory organs) or by council, the senate or jointly, or by the Vice-Chancellor (administrative committee). The committees sometimes have powers delegated to them by law, i.e. are statutory or in other advisory. The composition, terms of reference and quorum for the meetings of the committees are usually set out in the university calendar or other official university publication.

3.0

Research Method

Some basic historical documents were relied upon for purposes of data collection for this study –1984 Bulletin of National Universities Commission (NUC) on Merger of Universities of Technology, 1988 NUC Bulletin on 25 Years of Centralised University Education in Nigeria, 2002 and 2009 Bulletins of Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), and Ashby Commission Report of 1960

4.0 Results and Discussion

Industrial disputes and other forms of expression of discontent in a free society should be accepted as part of democracy. There is no doubt that where a group of people work together, there will be from time to time, differences of opinion. What is unacceptable is that disputes when they do occur need not drag on as long as they sometimes do. We believe that even though industrial disputes are part of the

life of organisations there should be approaches for resolving or managing them (Anyebe, 2001).

The Nigerian university, like its counter-part anywhere in the world, is a complex organization. Just as every complex organisation is characterized by various goals and objectives, the Nigerian university has to contend with numerous goals and objectives. Its functions (or roles of teaching, research and public service are often pursued with a view to satisfying the goals of producing manpower for the wider society.

In every Nigerian university, there exist a number of formal and informal interest groups whose activities in the course of promoting their personal and group interest often operate to negate the promotion of the primary purpose of the university. The first set of formal interest groups consist of teaching and non-teaching staff. The second category of the recognized formal interest groups in the university is that of labour. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) formed by the teaching staff, the Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU) belonging to the junior non-teaching staff, and Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) are good illustrations of such workers and staff unions that have articulated interests which must be reconciled with the primary goals of the university (Anyebe, 2001).

The third but no less important of the formal groups consist of the students union, the various faculty clubs and departmental associations, the registered voluntary clubs and associations including ethnic and state associations.

The fourth category of interest groups in the university is that of religious denominations, sects and even cults, some of whose adherents are faceless but whose activities affect the efficient management of the university system. The protests of the teaching, non-teaching staff and students constitute an internal problem facing the university administration. Perhaps, the most daring of the conflicts in recent times is the secret cult conflict.

4.1 Types of Conflicts

Here, attempts are made to identify the types of conflicts that are common on university campuses in Nigeria, their causes and how they are managed. There could be conflicts between staff and government, staff and administration, students and administration, students and government, students and staff, or even students versus students are also common.

4.1.1 Conflicts between Staff and Government

This type of conflict usually arises from issues related to university autonomy, poor funding, and conditions of service of staff. A joint press statement by an erstwhile

President of ASUU, Dr. Attahiru Jega and Isa Lawal Bala of SAUTTHRIAL, summarises the usual grievance of teaching and non-teaching staff of the Nigerian university thus:

...we are on strike because, rather than meet our demands government has attempted to deceive our members, and the public at large through deliberate misinformation. Our decision to act now is further reinforced by government's general lukewarm attitude to our consistent and repeated demands for appropriate funding and for the creation of a conducive atmosphere in order that the universities should be able to achieve the objectives for which they were established i.e teaching, research and service for national development. This issue can no longer be ignored. Its neglect is a deep cause of present grave situation in the universities. Since 1983, our unions have consistently called attention to the grave consequences of underfunding of the universities, the under-mining of university autonomy and the non-implementation of many aspects of the agreements between the federal government and the university staff unions (Jega & Isa, 1988).

Poor conditions of service, heavy workload and poor facilities and working environment, all contribute to the frustration of the teaching and non-teaching staff and this situation led to a series of strikes in the 1990s. The problem is epitomized in the popular slogan of ASUU: 'My Take Home Pay Cannot Take Me Home'. The negative effects of the foregoing on the university system were highlighted in a memorandum to the Etsu Nupe led Sub-Committee of the Joint National Committee of the Traditional Rulers and Leaders of Thought on crises in Nigerian universities by the erstwhile leader of ASUU as follows:

The adverse consequences of poor salaries and other conditions of service of university teachers for the university system are great. One of the most pernicious consequences is that the standard of university education declines. A lecturer's job, if it is to be done properly, is almost a twenty-four hour engagement. A lecturer who has to take time off to do other things to supplement his income cannot give his best to the system (Asobie, 1996: 9).

There were other confrontations between ASUU and government which led to an agreement between the two in 2001, popularly known as 2001 Agreement. Its non-implementation led to a six-month strike in 2003 and over five-month strike in 2013. The strategy adopted by the government to stop the strike was to stop the salaries of the striking workers (No work no pay). The act was aimed at paralyzing the workers financially but it only succeeded in shifting the heat to the university administrators who procure peace on their campuses by paying the withheld salaries secretly under various guises such as loans, welfare package etc.

4.1.2 Conflict between Staff and Administration

This type of conflict usually arises from perceived loss of confidence in the internal system of justice by staff or some of the staff. With the loss of confidence in the capacity of administration to provide justice and security, the staff concerned may resort to their own means of addressing the situation vide confrontation with administration.

The case Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria faced in 1995 could provide a good illustration. Perhaps, the most trying period the University ever faced was in 1995 when the crises on the campus culminated into the appointment of a sole administrator, who, to the astonishment of the academic world was a military personnel in the person of Major-General Mamman Kontagora (Rtd). The social and academic life in the university preceding the appointment degenerated into a sustained paralysis.

Ethnic and selfish interests were overtly promoted as exemplified by the activities of the Yoruba Forum and the Northern Elements Coalition (NECO). The activities of these ethnic groups adversely affected the University. The committee system collapsed. The Senate Building housing the central administrative staff and managers was locked up intermittently for four weeks and as such administrative and support services were paralysed. Staff and students were harassed and intimidated and lectures disrupted. This situation which started building up in 1993, made it impossible for the convocation of students, promotion of staff and meetings of congregation to hold between 1993-1998.

The perceived role of the Vice-Chancellor in the alleged dominant position of the Yorubas among teaching staff and the democratization of appointments as it affected the appointment of directors of institutes and centers contributed to this disharmony. The Governing Council of the University could not resolve the crisis on the campus, and so an external authority, namely, Col. Ja'afaru Isa, the then Governor of Kaduna State, was invited to mediate. This failed and so a military sole administrator was appointed, who set up several committees to probe so many issues.

There was mass retirement and dismissal of over 300 senior and junior staff including academic staff. It must be emphasized that, since its establishment, the University recorded the greatest loss of academic staff as a result of dismissal, retirement, terminations and panic withdrawal of services during the administration. Again, in 2003 there was another serious crisis between ASUU and the university management over withheld salaries and the then Vice-Chancellor, Professor Abdullahi Mahadi was believed by the Union to be the brain behind the stoppage.

4.1.3 Conflict between Students and Administration

This type of conflict usually arises from disagreement between the authorities in the universities and the students. Issues in conflict are mainly those that directly affect the welfare of the students. This may include the provision of basic social amenities and social services, as well as matters relating to fees, catering, water, electricity, accommodation, transport, school fees and levies and freedom. These issues constitute a major basis for student's conflicts in Nigerian universities. For example, in 1971, the students of Nnamdi Azikiwe hall of the University of Ibadan wanted Mrs. Apamkpa, the Hall catering officer removed because of poor food. The situation went beyond the Azikiwe hall management (warden and adviser) and escalated into a class between the police and the student union leading to the death of Kunle Adepoju (the first of such causality in the Nigerian university system). Also during the 1980/81 session, students of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria protested against the quality of rice served in the cafeterias. The disciplinary committee of the University after investigation suspended the union and rusticated over one hundred students. Earlier on, the students had burnt down the students Affairs stores and vandalized several university properties.

Again in 1987, when the Ahmadu Bello University authorities barred male students from entering halls of residence of female students, the students protested violently and this led to the closure of the University. On this subject, Oluwaga was of the view that strikes, violent protests and confrontation inevitably result in losses ranging from disruption of lectures to damage to lives and property (Oluwaga, 1989).

The Abisoye panel of inquiry investigated the crises caused by students' breach of the law barring male students entering female hostels and the students' demand for their colleagues who were earlier rusticated be recalled. Mobile police and soldiers were invited and this led to the death of four students while over forty students were wounded and hospitalized. Lectures were disrupted for two months, the University was eventually closed down and the then Vice-Chancellor, Professor Anjo Abdullahi was asked to proceed

on sabbatical leave, six months to the end of his second term even when the federal government white paper on the subject found him blameless.

These conflicts that are mainly intra-institutional often take the forms of demonstrations or such protests as boycott of lectures. The demonstration might be peaceful or violent. A common feature of such protest, however, is that they often begin as peaceful demonstration but end up in violence, especially whenever they involve a clash with the police. Aspect of the violence may include disruption of properties within the institution, assault of target staff or officials involved in the disputes (Onyeonoru, 2000).

The management of such conflicts at the institutional level usually includes the immediate closure of the institution, with ultimatum given to students to vacate the campus. Another strategy employed by campus administrators is the suspension or dissolution of the students union and/or its executives. It should be noted, however, that the management of student's conflicts at this level has often been in compliance with instructions from the government.

4.1.4 Students versus Government Conflicts

Factors that lead to conflicts in this category often relate to macro socio-political, economic or educational policy issues that affect the welfare of the students directly or indirectly. Such conflicts often commence with the students union issuing a statement objecting to the policies. This is usually followed by an ultimatum ordering the government to rescind the decision, or expect a popular resistance. An example of this is the National Youth Corps programme introduced by the Gowon administration in 1973, which sparked off violent and spontaneous reactions from students. Another example is the increase in school fees in the 1976/77 session, which caused riots popularly, described as *Ali Must Go* (Sandra, 1992). The then Federal Commissioner for Education, Colonel Ahmadu Ali, was believed by students to be the brain behind the new policy of the government to increase tuition fees.

In concrete terms, the strategies employed by the students in conflicts in this category are largely similar to those in the first category above. In addition, however, such demonstrations sometimes go beyond the campus gates into the town. The rationale is to sensitize members of the public to the issues involved in the conflict, especially when they relate to the overall interest of the public. At such times, the students extend their campaigns to the vulnerable group in the society, such as market women and men who are hereby mobilized to join the protests. A good example of this is the May 1989 Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) riots in which the students went into the towns to mobilize members of the public by explaining to them, even in local languages, the issues involved in the adjustment policies, and their

implication for the national, zonal and local offices of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). The response of the government to such conflicts varies; but it often involves the strategies highlighted in the first category above. Specifically, when the protest has a national impact, the government often reacts by proscribing the students' organization at the national level. The Babangida Administration even went to the extent of enacting decrees to manage students' crisis. For instance, it enacted Decree No, 47 of 1989, which was promulgated in December 1989, following the SAP riots. The Decree stipulated severe penalties for offenders, including N50,000.00 fine or a five-year terms of imprisonment, or both, for persons convicted by the Special Tribunal set up under the Decree. Moreover, the administrators of higher institutions were vested with powers to proscribe any Students Union or organization that engaged in activities considered not being in the public interest. Convicted members of such organizations are made liable to indefinite suspension or dismissal by the Minister of Education or any other delegated authority. This was an indication that the internal machinery for conflict management in the higher institutions in Nigeria was no longer capable of dealing with the level of conflicts that manifest themselves in the educational system. The government, therefore, resorted to the externalization of its crisis management through the tribunal, with implication for institutional autonomy and the internal system of justice.

The Administration also introduced voluntary unionism in the higher institutions, which made it discretionary for students to belong to the Students Union. In the light of financial difficulties experienced by the students due to the economic crises and adjustment at that period, this act was aimed at stifling the student's union by starving them of funds, thereby frustrating their activities. The policy was in contrast with the hitherto system of compulsory student unionism and automatic deduction by the university of fees for membership of the student union by students (Onyeonoru, 2000). It must be pointed out here that conflicts in this category have expectedly recorded the highest frequency of student-police clashes, destruction of lives and properties, arson, looting, vandalisation, sexual assault etc.

4.1.5 Conflicts between Students and Staff

This type of conflicts often occurs when other formal interest groups on campus attempt to pursue their own interest at the expense of that of the students. A common example is the situation where unions in the institutions, whose jobs relate to social well-being of the students, often choose such strategic times as examination period to pursue their dispute with the administration through strike. Such conflicts may involve an element of violence when it is students versus non-teaching staff. Striking members of

NASU, for instance, often disrupt public water and power supply on campuses in a bid to make their strike more effective, thereby adversely affecting the well-being of the students and the campus community at large. This was rampant in Nigerian universities during the NASU strikes for parity in conditions of service with the teaching staff in 1992 and 1996.

Students are known to attack the strikers for disrupting their social life as they question the right of the latter to temper with public utilities, an action considered in excess of strike action associated with the withdrawal of service. Students versus staff conflicts are not often pursued in the open when it concerns students and the teaching staff especially when it has to do with industrial action. This may be partly because they often cleverly, carry along with their demands the needs of the students. Furthermore, the reality of a more direct influence of the teaching staff over students put the latter in a relatively disadvantaged power position to effectively oppose the former. Hence, the students prefer to tread softly, using appeals instead of employing confrontation (Onyeonoru, 2000).

4.1.6 Students versus Students Conflicts

These conflicts include those among students with varying religious persuasions, especially between Christians and Muslims, clashes between rival political camps on campus, usually during student union politics. For example, in May 1979, the Muslim Student Society (MSS) of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria resolved to stop the sale of alcohol on the campus and the consumption of palm wine by the "Kegites" club. This religious intolerance led to the destruction of kiosks selling alcohol, damage to Senior Staff Club on the main campus in Samaru, and also the disruption of lectures for one week. The university authorities expelled the entire MSS Executive Committee members. The most common manifestations of students-versus-students conflict in recent times are associated with campus secret cults. By the late 1990s, there were about 40 different campus secret cults in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Sometimes, the conflicts involve rival secret cults or cult members and other student organizations or other social groups on campus (Ogunbameru. 1997: Ogunsanya. 2000: Osha, 2000). Between December 1992 and June 1998, 207 criminal activities were carried out by suspected cult members in the University of Ibadan (Ogunsanya.2000).

It may be necessary to give a definition of campus secret cult here. It may be defined as an association of students in which members are bound by an oath of secrecy. It usually requires elaborate forms of ritualistic initiation for recruitment, and adopts peculiar use of symbols, passwords or handgrip as peculiar means of mutual recognition. In

modern day Nigeria universities, secret cults are usually set up to engage in subversive and criminal activities but this was not the objective at the beginning. The first secret cult emerged at the University of Ibadan in the 1950s essentially, to promote nationalism. It was instituted to enforce and maintain tribal traditions, customs and beliefs which were believed to be in danger of changing. Soon thereafter, rival factions sprang up and in the competition to determine the "power" on campus, the cults became involved in criminal activities and bloodletting. Members have become more daring and carry out their mayhem in broad daylight. Secret cults have spread to virtually all tertiary institutions and even beyond to primary and post primary institutions. More females are joining and there are even exclusively female cults (Maliki,2005).

Secret cults go by, and live up to such names as Buccaneers, Black axe, Temple of Eden, KKK, Mermaids, Daughters of Jezebel, Eye Confraternity, and so on. They look for their recruits mostly from known "bold/stubborn/tough/crime"-minded students and children of the wealthy. The former for the daring acts of "bravery" required and the latter for easy access to cash (to procure dangerous weapons) and from the protection that will come from their powerful parents. Many cult groups charge "protection money" from wealthy students particularly ladies. Any student approached who refuses to pay for protection may be attacked.

Cult-conflict assumed a crisis dimension from the late 1980s during the Babangida administration, and resulted in the closure of several institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. It has also led to expulsion and rustication of several students. The situation was generally the same all over the country in universities and polytechnics as it was in other higher institutions like colleges of education. In fact, the cult scare has assumed a more dangerous dimension, with its activities now extended to secondary schools (*Tribune*, August 8, 1997). For many years, public concern about crisis featured constantly in Nigerian news media. The crisis situation in somehow captured by the following editorial:

The spate of killings and maiming by the cultists in our higher institutions has reached a level whereby no parent can be sure of the safety of his child in any of those institutions as long as the cult activities are left to operate.

(Vanguard Editorial,
Monday, February 17, 1997)

The above editorial was in response to the clash of cultists in Lagos State University (LASU) that left two students killed

and many others injured before the intervention by the Lagos State anti-crime patrol, *Operation Sweep*. Such is the situation in most tertiary institutions especially in the southern part of the country. The alarming dimension of cult conflicts on the campuses is that several of them involve the use of dangerous weapons including firearms. Hence, by 1997, no fewer than twenty students had been killed in secret cult related violence in Nigerian universities (Osha, 2000).

In July 1999, Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) was closed down due to clashes between cult members armed with lethal weapons drawn from students, staff and university management. About seven students lost their lives and several others sustained injuries, which led to the suspension of the Vice Chancellor who was alleged to be a cultist. In view of the magnitude of problem, the Federal Government set up a panel of inquiry to investigate the incidence (Ajayi, 1999:1-2). It is therefore, a great risk for any university manager to pretend that these groups do not exist.

Normally, management of cult conflicts by the authorities often involves the imposition of curfew on the campus, setting up of panels of investigation to identify the culprits, suspensions, rustication or outright expulsion of students identified as cult members, and the illumination of the campus environment to avert dark spots. Serious cases of cult conflicts may result in outright closure of the institutions involved, and invitation of the state security agents to ensure safety and peace on campus.

The series of disruptions, closures and violence that characterized union activities in the first twenty years of university education mainly emanated from involvement of staff and students in national and international politics. Inspired by ideology of decolonisation; welfarism; and independence; the staff and students sought to protect their privileges and academic freedom while simultaneously opposing neo-colonialism in all its ramifications.

However, the period 1980-2013 is characterized by phenomenal expansion of university education. This expansion, inevitably has posed serious challenges such as inadequate funding and the overstretching of limited facilities and these in turn have generated a series of crises in the system. For example, from Abuja Metro investigations, the nation's university system has lost close to three years to strike in 14 years (Emewu, 2013). Because these strikes were not continuous, it unleashed 14 interruptions in 14 years, indicating that no year has been spared of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike in the period under review.

Table 1. ASUU Strikes, 1999-2013

Year	No of months
1999	5months
2001	3months
2003	6months that stretched into early
2005	3days
2006	1week
2007	3months
2008	1week
2009	4months
2010	5months, 1week
2011	3months that extended into 2012
2013	Over 3 months
Total	33months, (and) 15days.

Source: Daily Sun at www.sunnewsonline.com

From the table 1, it is evident that the ASUU strike is taking much of the little time available to the university system. This must be affecting the stability of the system. The protests of staff and students constitute an internal problem facing the university administration. For example the long strike of ASUU which commenced on the 1st of July 2013 and was called off on the 17th of December of the same year, disrupted academic activities of public universities for over 5 months.

One frustrating aspect of these conflicts lies in their reoccurrence, irrespective of tough measures adopted by institutions' authorities and government. In fact, the conflicts have become more sophisticated in recent times with the activities of the clandestine associations, campus secret cults whose members kill and maim. Measures adopted in the management of the conflicts have proved ineffective and hence inappropriate.

Many scholars are of the opinion that communication is the most important tool in conflict resolution. Communication used in collaborative problem-solving or in negotiation is just about the only way to solve conflict. Therefore, when there is conflict you must communicate about it openly where the conflicting parties are present, and not behind their backs, which would amount to gossip. In other words, conflict must be talked out of the way (Anyebe, 2013).

There are three main causes of conflict on the campuses of Nigerian universities:

- A clash of interest
- A clash of personalities
- Misunderstanding.

Each of these causes requires a different approach. In the case of a clash of interests, negotiation must take place to find the middle course e.g. industrial disputes between union and government. Each party will have to give a little in order to gain some. The ideal is a win/win solution.

In the case of a clash of personalities communication must take place with the clashing personalities individually and separately. Try to get each one to accept the other for the sake of the common interest and the good cause e.g. conflicts between ASUU and SSANU. In this instance there must be a mediator. The mediator should not make promises to either of the clashing parties. They must take responsibility for peace between them.

In the case of a misunderstanding, talking it out must resolve it and set the record straight. Quite often people put a different interpretation on a decision that has been taken. In such a case the group involved must decide what the correct interpretation is (Anyebe, 2013). The need for effective communication therefore, becomes self-evident and inescapable.

5.0 Conclusion

It is concluded that there is ineffective handling of conflicts on the campuses of Nigerian universities, partly because of the ineffective use of committee system and communication strategies. The crises on the campuses of the Nigerian universities should be looked at from the point of view of the systems conception of the institutions, and conflict management strategies must take a similar holistic and systematic perspective that will account for the root causes identified in this study.

The authoritarian handling of conflicts that is dominant in our universities should be replaced with a situation where social justice is executed by a morally just authority. This is a perspective for managing such conflicts. When authority is maintained only by force, peace and harmony are illusory as the spirit of unrest and discontent remain latent. The appetites superficially retrained can revolt at the slightest provocation. Solutions to campus conflicts must, therefore, be sought within a democratic framework which will not only call for the participation of all, but also ensure that equity is embraced and social justice emphasized in the larger society. The Vice-Chancellor of Nigerian University should undertake periodic briefing of the university community about and on special issues that affect all components of the institution. There should be regular meetings of congregation where matters affecting the well-being of the university is openly discussed in accordance with the university law and statute. Finding a lasting solution to a campus conflict is therefore, not a matter of patching up things but getting to the roots of the problems.

All this, of course, requires courage and time. It is nevertheless; salutary to remember that the agreement signed between government and unions in 2013 to implement the 2009 pact is a right step in the right direction, provided the implementation is done with sincerity and transparency.

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