



Does Collaboration and Avoidance as Conflict Management Strategies Enhance University Development in South–South Nigeria?

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Abstract

The study examined collaboration and avoidance as conflict management strategies in enhancing university development in south-south Nigeria. Two objectives, two research questions and two corresponding hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The study is a descriptive and a correlational design. The population of this study comprised all the staff (management, academic, Non-teaching (registry and bursary staff), in the twenty (20) public universities (7 federal and 13 state) in South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. A sample of 900 respondents (comprising 180 management staff, 300 registry staff, and 420 academic staff) were selected in a five-phased multistage sampling technique in twelve (12) public universities in 6 cluster classification (Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers) in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Three (3) experts validated self-structured instrument titled “Collaboration and Avoidance as Conflict Management Strategies for Enhance University Development” (CACMSUD)” with a reliability coefficient of .943. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation (with a criterion mean cut off of 2.50) to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The study revealed that collaboration and avoidance strategies as method for conflict management resolution have significant relationships with university development in the south-south of Nigeria. recommendations are proffered.

Keywords: Collaboration, Avoidance, Conflict Management, Strategies, University Development, South-South Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Formal institutions (like universities) are structured with processes, activities and programmes for hiring, appraising and terminating/retiring staff at different cadres and positions that are expected to effectively drive systems, efficiently deliver services and optimally function in order to realize the university mandate. Thus, the aggregation of the roles, skills and knowledge of these staff in management, senior and junior cadres makes universities to proficiently operate and strategically positioned to admit students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels that would be trained, moulded, reformed and educated to align with their contemporaries anywhere in the world. However, these anticipated successes could be undermined by the existence of certain clashes, frictions, skirmishes or differences that its slightest existence could be antithetical to the harmonious work relationship required for attaining the goals and mandates of especially public universities in Nigeria.

In specificity, the nature of activities and programmes that take place in universities is operated and driven by humans or staff across different demographic characteristics that are integrated either in the academic or non-academic positions. These staff are on daily basis designated to individually or collaboratively discharge services, direct affairs, take decisions and engage in interactions that are expected to culminate towards the quality education and training of university students. On the other hand, the diligence, proactivity, efficiency and otherwise discharge of services and roles by academic and non-academic staff in especially public universities when apart misconstrued, unpalatable and even unpopular could pitch against or affect certain internal or external interest, thereby generating skirmishes or conflicts. In line with this, Adeyemi et al. (2014) ascribed conflict as a simple and inevitable friction that occurs among humans, systems and structures in organizations and societies.

Ositoye et al. (2012) saw conflict as the issues, crashes and differences that exists or happens between individuals, groups or parties that are structured in an organization or institution (like university). Additionally, conflict is often provoked, prompted and stimulated as a result of the incompatibility, misunderstanding and discordancy in the aspirations, orientations and interactions existing among individuals or group of persons in relation to different expectations, interests and backgrounds in the organization and society (Adesina, 2014; Oladele, 2015). In respect to this assertion, conflict could be sometime considered as unavoidable or inevitable and common or normal occurrence in an organization and society where personnel and humans/citizenry respectively daily congregate and exist to discharge roles or responsibilities as well as participate in programmes and activities towards self and collective development.

With the above information, it could be deduced that in situations, conditions and opportunities that culminate and trigger conflicts in universities arises as a result of disagreements, insubordinations and even deliberate mischievousness exhibited by the humans and officials that are driving the inherent systems and processes. This means that conflicts could most times emanate from internal workings that leads to the creation of systems, conditions and processes wherein humans, parties or stakeholders in an institution (like university) differently perceive issues, variedly aspire based on their background, and unresponsively and indirectly reach or arrive at compromise with their colleagues on issues of common interest. In view of this, Adaeze (2016) stated that the mode of information dissemination, decisioning processes and appointment criteria could escalate conflicts that may often lead to protest, strikes and disruption of works including activities and programmes that could affect management in tertiary institutions (especially universities) in Nigeria.

However, the expected interactions, relations and synergies that is naturally required from practitioners, management, personnel and even students in order to realize the goals of university education can be fraught with or challenged by diversity in backgrounds, aspirations, values, views, beliefs, traits, perspectives and practices which in certain instances could be contradictory to the nature and form of interactions and workings in institutions. In other words, it therefore, implies that the multispectral engagements, interactions, decisions, policies, appointments and instructions that take place in universities on daily basis whether ethically or unethically based could ignite or stir conflicts of different magnitude. These conflicts could occur between university management-staff, unions, lecturer-student, lecturer-lecturer, teaching-non-teaching staff, university management-host community, university management-university community, and most certainly, student-student interactions.

The possibility that the existence of certain clashes, skirmishes or frictions could stir disenchantments or differences among hierarchical structures and cadres in universities thereby, erupting issues that could meaningfully influence the operational capacity and level of development in universities. This standpoint, underscores the relevance of the assertion by Oni (2015) on the adoption of conflict management in order to enhance the capacity of universities to strategically and systematically set up measures that would help facilitate ethical and harmonious working relationships among otherwise contending parties and diverse interests that could truncate the goal of universities making significant inroads that translate towards their development that aligns with global best standards.

Furthermore, conflict is a pointer to the existence of discrepancies and somewhat freedom in the work environment. On the other hand, the absence or non-existence of conflict could literally imply the possibility of highhanded and autocratic leadership style prevalent in such universities. Hence, the later; could be branded or ascribed as stifling employee freedom, thereby, suggesting that a certain system is not functioning to the expected or projected level of employee-employer harmony and collaboration that could facilitate holistic development. This therefore, means that a university could advance the level and quality of education that culminates to multifaceted developments that could pinpoint management efficiency even in the midst of several unresolved conflicts that would increasingly strain staff relationship thereby, breeding poor working conditions.

Alabi (2014) frowned at certain management decisions that stems on preventing conflict including leaving conflict situations unreasoned and secondary issue due to the intent of not missing out on the primary goal of the university. This scenario is ascribed as a “time bomb” that would do someday explode or blowup multivariate issues likely to implode or crumble the entire system. In view of this, it is important for everyone (management, staff and students) in the university community to come to terms that conflicts are common occurrences in virtually every life endeavour including administrative processes and systems in an institution (like university). This means the possibility that there could exist some degree of misconceptions, inharmoniousness, discrepancies and difference are certainly inevitable and may exist in reality or may only be perceived by the parties involved.

Since the existence of conflicts in an institution could be somewhat inevitable in almost all human driven systems and institutions. In view of this, Alabi (2014) that figuring out and ascertaining the triggers or causes of conflicts especially in Nigeria universities would suffice as an efficient and sustainable conflict management strategy. Corroborating this view, Bercovitch (2015) opined that the aggregation of conflict causative factors prior to applying or integrating specific conflict management strategy suffices as a framework and sustainable way to scrutinize

management proficiency, effectiveness, forthrightness, performance and productivity in any institution or organization.

Although, often humans tend to view conflict as a negative force operating against successful completion and attainment of individual aspirations as well as group or organizational and collective goals. However, the existence of conflicts in a university system and community could create negative impact to the university but may also lead to positive effects depending on the nature of the conflict and the management or resolution strategy that is adopted. This implies that not all conflicts are bad and not all conflicts are good. This explains why Oladele (2015) asserted that conflicts in universities are rarely resolved easily and to certain extent most conflicts are managed as individuals (staff members and even students) are expected to overtime work out their differences or resolve their conflicting areas.

Osakede et al. (2018) emphasized that the possible sources of conflict existing in universities include among others: differences in goals or plans for the allocation of resources, misinterpretation or inconsistent application of institutional regulations, breaches of formal or informal contracts, power struggles and personal antagonisms are all issues to justify the description of conflict as a form of socialization because it could arise as a result of the humans (comprising university management, academic and non-academic staff and students) expression of their inalienable God given and Constitutional empowered rights to worship, affiliates, preferences, reasoning, religiousness and intuition. The expression and practice of these inalienable rights (as the case may be) could result in the slow, fast and even overzealous discharge of responsibilities thereby, causing ripples and resentments from colleagues who perceive things differently, thereby stocking up issues that culminate to conflicts that could be antithetical to the actualization of actions and policies in an institution (like university).

Oni (2015) emphasized that the plausibility for the existence of conflicts in universities help to keep the university administrators or management to become abreast with the contemporary dynamics and resolution strategies in line with the current global trends with localized application towards corporate performance and effective development in universities. In addition, Osakede et al. (2018) asserted that the inevitable occurrence of conflict makes it imperative for the engagement of conflict management practitioners in order to help proffer solutions towards the resolution of conflicts as well as ensuring the growth, survival and performance of universities in Nigeria. Thus, the implication of the inevitability of conflicts in universities necessitated the adoption of conflict management as a professional practice that prescribes the strategies for proactively and positively handling and preventing conflicts in universities.

Although, conflicts are often generally ascribed to occur under many proven and unsubstantiated scenarios, trajectories, narratives and similarities in the dispute culture across universities (Idowu, 2014). However, viewing or considering each conflict situation as exclusive, peculiar and different would help to figure out steps and processes for handling or dealing with each conflict that arises in universities. Corroborating this view, Osakede et al. (2018) suggested that effectively and sustainably managing conflicts that arises in universities is dependent on the mechanism and systems that are instituted to facilitate the proper assessment and description of the underlying local factors and triggers. This implies that the knowledge of the peculiarity of each conflict is both strategic and imperative towards the timely uncovering of issues that would lead to the effective management of such conflicts in such a way or manner that it would result in the positive resolution of issues that manifests in the sustainable development of universities in Nigeria.

Additionally, there is the plausibility that external conditions or situations that may apparently have no direct relationship with the university could become a source and basis for the occurrence of conflicts that engulfs the system (Adejuwon & Okewale, 2014). This could thereby, lead or result in actions taken against the issues surrounding such externally propelled conflicts that eventually plays out in the university to be opposed by certain members of the university community such as staff, students and vendors.

Conflict has been observed to be in existence in all human organizations including the universities system. It could be described as all forms of opposition, disagreement, friction between two or more parties and it manifests in the forms of arguments, protests, demonstration, aggression and other destructive behaviours, while conflict occurrence have been observed to be inevitable and ubiquitous in human organizations, the strategies for managing it have remained topical issues and matters of concern to individuals, groups and scholars (Cheta-Maclean & Tobins, 2023). Conflict management strategies refer to the internal mechanisms used by the various authorities in resolving conflicts that have the propensity to affect sustainable development in universities (Olajide, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Conflict is a part of the activities, programmes and processes that exist in organizations (such as colleges and universities). In specificity, its occurrence in universities makes these citadels of learning no longer be seen as quiet enclaves free from the arousal of differences and misconceptions among virtually all the hierarchical structures and cadres in universities. Additionally, differences in goals or plans for the allocation of resources, misinterpretation or inconsistent application of institutional regulations, breaches of formal or informal contracts, power struggles and personal antagonisms are all possible sources of conflict that could inevitably occur in universities in Nigeria.

It has been observed that Nigerian universities has for decades been faced with so many crisis ranging from conflict between academic staff and university administrators, students versus Academic staff, students versus university authorities, Non-Academic staff versus university administrators. The conflicts have given rise to distrust and hostility among professionals and academics thus contributing in hampering smooth, effective and efficient administration or management in especially public universities. It also appeared that despite this situation, stakeholders in education seemed to develop non-challant attitude towards these conflicts. If this role conflict is not checked it can be descriptive and negative as people involved will often see one another as enemies. This is unwholesome for the university community and Nigeria educational system as a whole. It therefore becomes expedient that role conflict among university administrators in Nigeria be investigated to proffer feasible and most proficient strategies among the avalanche or barrage of options such as collaboration, avoidance, accommodation, compromise and competing among other strategies for minimizing or avoiding it. It is based on this backdrop that this study therefore examined conflict management strategies and its implication on university development in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study was to examine if collaboration and avoidance as conflict management strategies enhance university development in south-south Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- Ascertain the impact of collaboration strategy on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.
- Determine the impact of avoidance strategy on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were stated to guide this research:

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

Hypotheses

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

- There is no significant relationship between collaboration strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.
- There is no significant relationship between avoidance strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Conflict

The word conflict originated from the Latin word “conflictus” meaning “striking together”. They are inevitable in all organizations including educational institutions. Conflict is therefore a social problem due to dissimilarities in human needs, needs disposition, backgrounds and temperance. According to Onwura (2010), conflict is a product of interaction between or among people. It can only occur among those who interact, have interacted or will interact. It implies disagreement in opinion, opposition of interests due to individual differences and characteristics. Conflict arises where there is competition between or among individuals either tangible or intangible. Akinwonmi (2005) defined conflict as a disagreement or incompatibility between two or more parts which sometimes are characterized by hostility and avoidance. Ositoye et al. (2012) averred that conflict can be disagreement that exists between one or two parties. According to them, it creates situations where both parties perceived a situation indifferent directions in reaching compromise on issues of common interest.

Conflicts are common occurrences in life. Fiske (1990) saw conflict as an incompatibility of goals or values between two or more parties in a relationship combined with attempts to control each other. The incompatibility or difference may exist in reality or may only be perceived by the parties involved.

Conflict, if not checked in its developmental stages, may graduate to crisis, hatred, violence, escalating to fighting, emotional accusation and litigation. These consequential actions will consume most of the time and resources of the organization thereby dwarfing the organization's productivity level. In that regard, Song et al. (2006) opined that conflict is a frequent occurrence in the workplace. In fact in an organizational setting, conflict consumes up to 20 percent of employees time. Friedman, Tidd, Curral and Tsai (2000) observed that conflict occurs through the communication of a variety of issues including differences of opinion, procedural problems and disagreement over approaches to work oriented tasks. Conflict is endemic in all social life. It is an inevitable part of living because it is related to situations of scarce resources, division of functions, power relations and role-differentiation (Bercovitch, 2011). Consequently, every organization should, as a matter of urgency, devise strategies for managing conflicts, seeing that they are unavoidable in any human organization.

Amason (1996) described conflict as a form of socialization. He stressed that people in organizations have both personal and role preferences about the organizations' actions and policies. However, conflict exists whenever it is impossible for others to carry out their desired action. Hence, Bens (1997) reported that conflict is the tension that is experienced when a group of people feels that their needs or desires are likely to be denied. Thus, in a related survey, Adeyemi (2010) found that in the Nigerian school system, conflict occurs from time to time.

De Janasz et al. (2006) stressed that conflict is a fact of life in organizations. According to Folgers and Shubert (1995), colleges and universities are no longer seen as quiet enclaves free from the conflicts that arise in all hierarchical organization. Differences in individual or personal aspirations, organizational objectives alongside, the goals or plans for the allocation of authorities, resources and appointments could also trigger the cycle of crisis thereby, escalating conflicts of varying dimensions. Thus, conflicting issues could result in misinterpretation or inconsistent application of institutional regulations, breaches of formal or informal contracts, power struggles and personal antagonisms are all possible sources of conflict.

Conflict in the University

Conflicts are inevitable in any work-organization. However, there is contestation as to whether management of organizational conflicts enhances or deteriorates the development of the university community. Organizational conflict manifests in various forms and has differing causative factors. Social factors like inadequate motivation, political interference in labour issues and undue pressure exerted on the organizational structure by employers of labour often cause conflicts in organizations. No wonder Ololube (2024) detailed the causes of conflict in organization to include—style of management, social consciousness of workers, irregular or non-payment of salaries and wages, improper termination of appointment, condition of employments that does not make for average living, promotional and motivational factors, cumbersome grievances and dispute procedure, breach of collective agreement, anti-union actions, interdependence, difference in goals and differences in the perception of reality.

Nigerian university system has witnessed a plethora of strike in recent times occasioned by inadequate motivation of staff, and this has accounted for low productivity and output in students. Lecturers have some problems (needs) that are to be solved so as to

enable them perform their duties more efficiently. But in a situation where these needs are not met, conflict may occur, and if not resolved or well managed, it can lead to insubordination, frustration, truancy and extortion on the part of lecturers. This invariably has adverse effects on students because they may not cover their syllabus which could lead to poor productivity. They may also use the strike period to get involved in antisocial behaviour such as drug abuse and alcoholism, prostitution, gambling, rape, robbery and kidnapping since an 'idle mind is the devil's workshop'.

Bercovitch (2015) traced the cause of conflict in organizations to the units of analysis involved. According to him, units of analysis are the parties to a conflict. They perceive, initiate and sustain a conflict. Their characteristics specify the conditions which affect the cause of a conflict and determine the mode of its management. By implication, there exists conflicts that originate in the individual person, conflicts that have their bases in the relationship between individuals, and conflicts that are caused as a result of interactions between groups.

Robbins (1998) reiterated that conflict, though can be destructive, leads to improvements in the quality of decisions, stimulation of creativity and innovation, and it can encourage interest and curiosity. Functional and constructive conflict can provide a medium through which problems can be aired and tension released, and also an environment of self-evaluation and positive change.

Depending on how conflict is managed in the university, the experience can be growth enhancing for the individuals involved or destructive to relationships and self-esteem. Conflict, if well managed, can utilize the creativity and problem-solving skills of workers, taking advantage of different gender, cultural and role perspectives in creating mutually beneficial solutions. But badly managed conflict or consistently avoided one, reduces productivity, undermines trust and may spawn additional conflicts (Cheta-Maclean & Tobins, 2023). Based on this, Bercovitch (2015), quoting Boulding (1957), Aubert (1963) and Deutsch (1969), stated that administrators must not seek to stifle or eliminate organizational conflict for that is hardly a realistic goal. An organization devoid of conflict may indicate autocracy, uniformity, stagnation and mental fixity. It would also be protecting only the vested interests of the status quo. Administrators must accept, and indeed, occasionally encourage conflict because change and other desirable consequences are products of conflict.

The challenge faced by administrators is to utilize such conflict management techniques that would ensure that as a conflict passes from a latent to a manifest phase, it proceeds towards its potential and realizes its constructive values. However, studies have shown that conflict could be negative or dysfunctional in an organization. To Robbins (1998), unconstructive or excessive levels of conflict can affect the effectiveness of the organization or the group, which can result in reduced satisfaction of employees, increased absence and turnover rates, and eventually, lower productivity.

Conflict Management

The definitions of "*conflict*" have been given by various scholars in different spectrums of studies. The Learners' Dictionary simply puts it as 'being in opposition or disagreement,' while Rahim (2012) viewed conflict as an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or difference within or between social entities (i.e. individuals, groups, organizations, etc.). In many occasions, conflict is synonymous with violence; however, the

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 1995) denied that assumption by explaining that conflict occurs not only in situations of violence, but also when there are differences in ideas, values, positions, and perspectives on a range of issues. Conflict is evident in different institutions in the society, however conflicts can be managed.

Nwachukwu (1988) defined management as the co-ordination of all the resources of an organization through the process of planning, organizing, directing and controlling in order to attain organizational objectives. Also, Akubue (1991) was of the view that management is a method where a group of people at the highest level of organization plan, organize, communicate, co-ordinate, control and direct the actions and activities of people who work for the organization toward the achievement of the organizational objectives. Management involves the effective organization and utilization of the human and material resources in a given system so that the aims and objectives of the system are achieved. It involves the exploitation, exploration and mobilization of material factors and human potentials for the attainment of organizational goals. Nwachukwu (1988) define management as getting things done through others. Explicitly, the management achieves the stated goals through the organizational activities of the employees.

Mgbodile (2004) succinctly defined management as the social or interactional process involving sequence of coordinated events planning, organizing, coordinating and controlling or leading in order to use available resources to achieve a desired outcome in the fastest and most efficient way. Mgbodile (2004) opined that it is with efficient management that an organization or institution can plan, organize, staff, control, direct and co-ordinate its activities to achieve predetermined goals. From the foregoing, it can be deduced that management involves human beings interacting in a given system; these interactions have specifically defined goals to achieve. These goals are achieved through the utilization of human and material resources of the organization, the interaction and use of resources shall be coordinated in a manner that will bring about the achievement of the organizational goals.

Educational management, according to Oboegbulem (2010), is concerned with the planning and formulation of educational policies or programmes with a view to achieving educational goals. He stated that educational management is the application of the process of planning, organizing, coordinating, controlling and evaluating human and material resources. One of the challenges that confront educational management is conflict within the educational system. These conflicts that emerge can be adequately managed to bring about growth and development.

The communication skills to address their disputes, their leaders often lack the necessary skills to be effective in conflict resolution. Once human resources personnel are involved, the process becomes punitive and results in disciplinary action, which contributes to an even greater reduction in employee morale and employee satisfaction. Within any organization, there are usually different positions and jobs. People occupying these positions have different perceptions, goals, thought and concerns. It is difficult to conceptualize society or an organization without inherent differences and contradictions and these leads to conflict. In organization a serious problem can be conflicts that are very serious. This is the bad practice that will be impossible for the workers to at the same place for work. With the permanent nature of conflict in work relations, high performance organizations will be those that may constantly develop the appropriate methods of managing conflict to achieve set-standards and goals. As is now established, the Nigerian organizations have for a long time been concerned with the effect of

conflict management on business performance in the country. However, empirical validation of findings across industries is very limited at best (Cheta-Maclean & Tobins, 2023).

Against this background, Ololube (2024) defined conflict management as the process of reducing tension and the negative effects of conflicts by the application of a number of measures aimed at fostering an understanding of the conflict situation by the parties involved. This remains the only viable option that can be applied where the process of conflict resolution has failed. Effective conflict management is perhaps the most basic requirement for faster organizational development and growth. Brewer et al. (2002) added that conflict is a frequent occurrence in the workplace and conflict management skills are necessary for individuals to function effectively at each and every level in an organization. Gross and Guerrero (2000) affirmed that in an organizational setting, when an individual is able to manage conflict effectively, they are better apt to communicate and lead, thus understanding that conflict in organization is essential. The prevalence of conflict has various negative implications for organization especially educational institutions. Meyer (2004) opined that conflicts have the potential to deteriorate organizational functioning by inducing resignations, absenteeism, accident as well as debilitating individual health and wellbeing.

Similarly, Rahim (2000) expressed the view that organizational conflict management is characterized by coming up with effective methods to control conflict and to improve the positive effects of conflict so as to allow the workers to learn and be effective in completing their responsibilities. This therefore shows that organizational conflict management techniques refer to methods that the management uses to resolve workplace disputes.

Therefore, conflict management is necessary in order to maintain sanity and cooperation in the workplace when conflict arises. Conflict must be managed effectively so as to prevent it from escalating to the point that the organization would not be able to handle it. Conflict management is the ability of an organization to identify the sources of conflict and implement effective measures to bring it under control.

Conflict Management Strategies

According to Ting-Toomey et al. (2001), conflict management strategies are general tendencies or modes of patterned responses to conflict in a variety of antagonistic interactive situations. Ololube (2024) viewed conflict management strategies as a choice, intention or plan of action based on a person's goals and his or her analysis of the situation. This definition by Putman was conceptualizing conflict management strategies as the preferred choice of handling a conflict based on the parties involved in the conflict. Conflict is often times managed differently according to the parties involved and the context surrounding the conflict. Conflict management strategies are not conflict resolution. Conflict management strategies involve implementing skills to limit the negative aspects of conflict and to increase the positive aspects of conflict at a level equal to or higher than where the conflict is taking place.

Furthermore, the aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes. However, conflict management is not targeted at eliminating all conflicts or avoiding them. Conflict can be valuable to groups and organizations when managed properly. Conflict resolution, as the name would suggest, involves the reduction, elimination or termination of all forms and types of conflict. In practice, it involves negotiation, bargaining, mediation or arbitration. According to Rahim (2000), conflict management involves strategically designing

effective macro-level strategies (framework) to minimize the dysfunctions of conflict and enhancing the constructive functions of conflict in order to enhance learning and effectiveness in an organization.

Various conflict management theories opined that a healthy conflict management system should integrate the internal sub-system with the higher level of the organizational hierarchy, while Ololube (2024) provided a four-way process which include assessment and inquiry, addresses the design, implementation and evaluation aimed at reaching a valid and objective conflict management decision. Conflict management strategies are the measures the management use to manage conflict in the university in order to improve staff performance. They are considered the mechanisms used by organizations in resolving conflict (Adeyemi & Ademila, 2015). Cheta-Maclean and Tobins (2023) opined that effectively managing conflict can bring about positive results like promotion of open communication, collaborative decision making, regular feedback and timely settlement of conflict. They also argued that in return, unmanaged conflict can as well promote dysfunctional communication and poor behaviour among employees which can have effect on overall employee morale thereby resulting in lower productivity.

In line with this, Ololube (2024) argued that organizations that constructively manage conflict tend to encourage a positive employee performance while ill-managed conflict result in lowered employee morale, reduced employee productivity, increased employee absenteeism, increased chances of losing skilled personnel, leads to loss man and machinery hours, and may lead to an decrease in service quality. The task of managing conflict is a major concern of administrators. Effective conflict management is necessary in an organization that wants to thrive. A review of different strategies or forms of conflict management techniques that can be employed at different phases of the development of a conflict is paramount to this study. Although every organization has its own modus operandi (MO) of managing conflict, they all are geared towards survival. As Bercovitch (2015) rightly stated, these MO are consciously employed by administrators to influence the course and development of a conflict. The success or effectiveness of such procedures can be gauged by the extent to which they help to achieve a satisfactory solution.

Collaboration Strategy as a Method of Conflict Resolution

The collaboration strategy in conflict resolution is an approach that seeks to address and reconcile the needs and interests of all parties involved through cooperative effort. Unlike strategies that focus on competition or compromise, collaboration aims to achieve a win-win outcome where all parties feel their concerns are adequately addressed. This method is particularly valued for its potential to foster lasting relationships and create innovative solutions to complex issues.

At the core of conflict resolution, the collaboration strategy involves open communication, mutual respect, and a commitment to finding a solution that benefits everyone involved (Fisher et al., 2011). It requires all parties to actively engage in dialogue, share their perspectives, and work together to understand each other's needs and concerns. This cooperative approach often leads to more creative and effective solutions compared to adversarial methods, as it leverages the collective insights and ideas of the participants (Ololube, 2024).

One of the key advantages of the collaboration strategy is its emphasis on maintaining and strengthening relationships. By focusing on mutual gains rather than individual victories,

collaboration helps to build trust and goodwill among parties. This can be particularly valuable in ongoing relationships, such as in organizational settings or long-term partnerships, where maintaining positive interactions is crucial for future cooperation (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011). For example, in team-based projects or cross-functional teams, collaboration can enhance teamwork, improve morale, and lead to better project outcomes (Onyekewre, 2024).

Moreover, collaboration can lead to more sustainable and durable solutions. When all parties are actively involved in the resolution process, they are more likely to be committed to implementing and upholding the agreed-upon solution. This buy-in is essential for the long-term success of the resolution, as it ensures that all parties are invested in making the solution work and addressing any potential issues that may arise (Fisher et al., 2011). However, the collaboration strategy is not without its challenges. It requires significant time and effort to engage all parties in meaningful dialogue and may not be feasible in situations where power imbalances exist or where parties are unwilling to cooperate (Cheta-Maclean, 2023). Additionally, achieving consensus can be difficult, particularly in cases where interests are deeply entrenched or where parties have limited resources (Cheta-Maclean & Tobins, 2023).

Avoidance Strategy as a Method of Conflict Resolution

The avoidance strategy in conflict resolution is a method characterized by the deliberate decision to sidestep or delay addressing a conflict. This approach involves evading direct confrontation and can manifest in various forms, such as ignoring the issue, postponing discussion, or withdrawing from the situation altogether. While often criticized for its potential to exacerbate underlying issues, avoidance can be strategically useful in certain contexts.

Avoidance is based on the idea that not all conflicts need to be addressed immediately or at all. It can be a practical choice when the conflict is perceived as minor, or when addressing it might lead to unproductive arguments or escalate tensions (Ololube, 2024). For instance, in cases where the issue at hand does not significantly impact the parties involved or where the conflict could be resolved through natural processes over time, avoidance might be an effective strategy. This method can also serve as a temporary measure to give parties time to cool off or to gather more information before engaging in resolution efforts (Fisher et al., 2011).

One major advantage of avoidance is that it can prevent unnecessary escalation. By choosing not to engage in a potentially heated discussion, parties can avoid worsening the conflict, which could happen if emotions run high or if the issue is particularly sensitive. In organizational settings, for example, managers might use avoidance to temporarily sidestep minor disputes among team members, allowing for a more controlled and less emotionally charged environment when they later address the issue (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011).

Additionally, avoidance can be a strategic choice when the conflict is deemed not worth the effort required to resolve it. This might occur in situations where the resolution would require significant resources or time, which may not be justifiable given the issue's relative insignificance (Onyekewre, 2024).

However, the avoidance strategy also has notable drawbacks. Prolonged avoidance can lead to unresolved issues festering over time, potentially escalating into more serious conflicts. It may also result in the perception of indifference or lack of accountability, damaging relationships and undermining trust (Cheta-Maclean, 2023; Cheta-Maclean & Tobins, 2023). In situations where the conflict impacts key aspects of the parties' interests or organizational objectives, avoiding the issue can lead to missed opportunities for constructive resolution and improvement.

While the avoidance strategy in conflict resolution may seem counterintuitive, it can be a practical approach in certain situations. Therefore, while avoidance can be a useful tactic in specific contexts, it should ideally be balanced with other conflict resolution strategies to ensure comprehensive and effective management of disputes (Ololube, 2024).

Development of Universities in Nigeria

Generally, higher education covers a wide range of higher learning institutions encompassing post-secondary and/or tertiary institutions such as universities, colleges of education, and polytechnics (Alemu, 2018). The concept of higher education is defined as tertiary education and a requirement for preparing professionals, encourage learning, and improve access to knowledge.

Nonetheless, the concept of education has changed significantly over the decades thereby making the boundaries unclear (Turner, 2011). In the contemporary era, universities are considered among the most successful higher education institutions contributing to foster learning and generate knowledge towards achieving educational goals and outcomes (Alemu, 2018). Nigeria is a Federal Republic located in Western Africa and is recognized as the most populous across the African continent. Hence, Nigeria is known as one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa. In 2021, the country has an estimated total population of 200,441,213. In terms of education, the federal government offers free universal basic education but student enrolment is very poor especially in northern Nigeria (Salihu et al., 2015).

The development history of higher education in Nigeria started over 80 years ago with the establishment of Yaba Higher College in 1932 and University College, Ibadan (UCI) in 1943, which was affiliated to the University of London then (Salihu & Jamil, 2015). In April 1959, the then colonial government established a commission (popularly known as Ashby commission) to look into the needs of higher education for the soon-to-be independent nation (Fabunmi, 2005). The development of public university education in Nigeria can be summarized into five generations. Six first-generation universities were established by 1965, the second-generation universities were established between 1974 and 1979, the third-generation universities were established between 1979 and 1983, the fourth-generation universities were established between 1988 and 2003, and universities establish between 2003 to date are considered as fifth or new generation universities (Salihu & Jamil, 2015).

Currently, Nigeria operates a minimum of 4-years in the university system, with public universities dominating the country's higher education landscape (Iruonagbe et al., 2015). According to Abdulraheem and Muhammed (2014), governance issues are viewed as one of the key factors to the unstable structure in Nigerian higher education. The same authors also found other factors contributing to the challenges for efficient governance in Nigerian higher education including funding, political interference, law, and leadership. Accordingly, there are main types of higher education providers in Nigeria; public and private institutions.

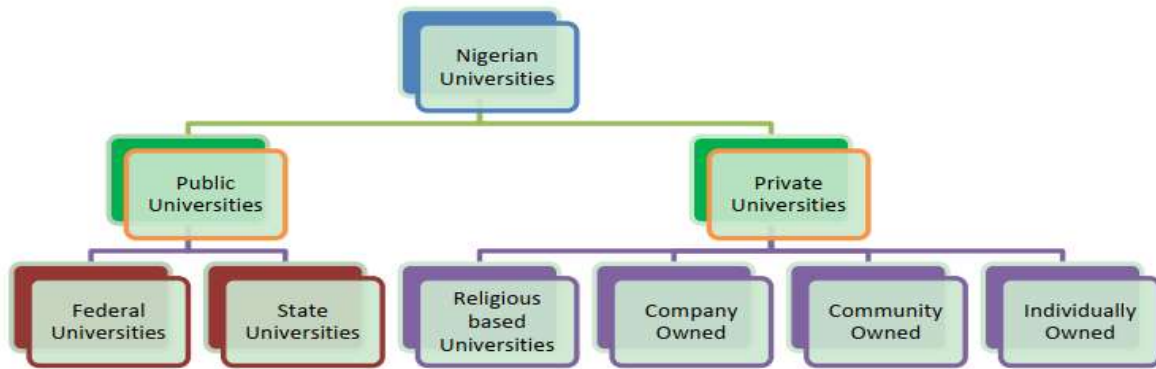


Figure 1: Ownership Classification of Universities in Nigeria. Source: Mogaji (2019)

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study formulated the descriptive and correlational design. The population of this study comprised all the staff (management staff 180, academic staff 420, non-academic 300 (i.e. registry and bursary staff), in the twenty (20) public universities (7 federal and 13 state) in South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. The breakdown of the population of management staff, academic and non-academic staff in each of the public universities in the six (6) states in South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria constituted the population for this present study. A sample of 900 respondents (comprising 180 management staff, 300 registry staff, and 420 academic staff) in twelve (12) public universities participated in the study.

The instrument for data collection was titled “Collaboration and Avoidance as Conflict Management Strategies for Enhance University Development (CACMSUD)”. The CACMSUD instrument was a self-structured 14 item questionnaire that was patterned after a four point rating scale of “Strongly Agree” (SA, 4 Points), “Agree” (A, 3 Points), “Disagree” (D, 2 Points), and “Strongly Disagree” (SD, 1 Point). The face and content validity of the CACMSUD instrument was determined by three academic staff in the Department of Educational Foundations (Ignatius Ajuru University of Education).

The reliability and internal consistency of the CACMSUD instrument was ascertained using Cronbach Alpha method. The Cronbach Alpha (r_a) method to obtain the reliability coefficient of .943 for the CACMSUD instrument. This obtained reliability coefficient necessitated the use of the CACMSUD instrument for the actual administration in this study.

The data for this study were sourced from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data source was gotten from information that was generated from the questionnaire or instrument that was administered to the respondents (management staff, registry staff and academic staff) in the universities (both federal and state) in South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. While the secondary data source was gotten from the information contained in textbooks, journals, magazines, newspapers, articles, lecture notes, monogram, modules, blogs, internet materials (like Wikipedia), and other documented publications.

The face-to-face and direct delivery technique was used for the administration of the CACMSUD instrument to the respondents by the researcher in company of his research assistants after the presentation of the “letter of authorization”. Upon the approval of the request,

900 copies of the serially numbered CACMSUD instrument was administered to the respondents (management staff, bursary staff and academic staff) in the 12 selected universities in South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria and upon completion of the administration process, the CACMSUD instrument was retrieved and used for the analysis. Out of the 900 copies of the CACMSUD instrument that was administered to the respondents (management staff, bursary staff and lecturers), only 867 copies (representing approximately 96% return rate) were validly retrieved and used for the analysis. Hence, the data analysis of this study was based on a sample of 867 respondents (management staff, bursary staff and academic staff).

The validly collected data from the 867 respondents was sorted, tabulated, scored, coded and subsequently analyzed using mean, standard deviation to answer the research questions (at criterion mean cut-off of 2.50), while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. All analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Answers to Research Questions

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

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on how collaboration strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria

S/N	How collaboration strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.	N=867			
		N=427 Federal University		N=440 State University	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	Collaboration engenders cooperation in the university community	3.13	.72	2.85	.62
2	Collaboration reduces work tension amongst staff	3.26	.57	2.92	.55
3	Collaboration reduces unhealthy competition amongst staff	3.24	.54	2.99	.41
4	Collaboration gets job done faster	3.15	.75	2.92	.59
5	Collaboration leads to maximum productivity	3.45	.59	3.08	.44
6	Effective communication amongst staff as a means of collaboration engenders university development	3.47	.57	3.09	.44
7	Collaboration within the various relationships that exist in the university community engenders university development	3.05	.75	2.62	.81
Grand Mean		3.25	0.64	2.92	0.55

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

Table 1 shows the mean rating and standard deviation on how collaboration strategy impact on the development of Universities in South-South Nigeria. It further shows that how collaboration strategy impact on the development of federal and state universities in South-South Nigeria include: effective communication amongst staff as a means of collaboration engenders university

development (with $\bar{x} = 3.47$ and $\bar{x} = 3.09$ respectively) in item 6, collaboration leads to maximum productivity ($\bar{x} = 3.45$ and $\bar{x} = 3.08$ respectively) in item 5, collaboration reduces work tension amongst staff ($\bar{x} = 3.26$ and $\bar{x} = 2.92$ respectively) in item 2, collaboration reduces unhealthy competition amongst staff ($\bar{x} = 3.24$ and $\bar{x} = 2.99$ respectively) in item 3, collaboration gets job done faster ($\bar{x} = 3.15$ and $\bar{x} = 2.92$ respectively) in item 4, collaboration engenders cooperation in the university community ($\bar{x} = 3.13$ and $\bar{x} = 2.85$ respectively) in item 1, while the least was collaboration within the various relationships that exist in the university community engenders university development ($\bar{x} = 3.05$ and $\bar{x} = 2.62$ respectively) in item 7. Furthermore the grand mean scores of 3.25 and 2.92 indicates that items 1-7 relates to how collaboration strategy impact on the development of federal and state universities in South-South Nigeria.

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

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on how avoidance strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria

S/N	How avoidance strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria	N=867				
		N=427 Federal University		N=440 State University		
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
8	Clarifying issues before they escalate fosters university development	3.19	.46	3.00	.27	*
9	Bringing together involved parties of a conflict for a talk eliminates the possible conflict escalation	3.21	.66	2.86	.66	
10	Monitoring conflict situations helps to deal with conflict situations under the right atmosphere	3.37	.53	3.05	.37	
11	Avoiding conflicts gives more time to adequately assess the situation and know how best to approach the situation	3.30	.55	2.75	.74	
12	Avoiding conflict situations helps deescalate conflicts	3.26	.73	2.87	.75	
13	Avoidance helps in avoiding unnecessary stressors that affects daily work flows	3.35	.55	2.89	.64	
14	Avoidance aids in the elimination of activities that can negatively affect the school community	3.28	.51	2.81	.74	
Grand Mean		3.28	0.57	2.89	0.60	

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

Table 2 shows the mean rating and standard deviation on how avoidance strategy impact on the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. It further shows that how avoidance strategy impact on the development of federal and state universities in South-South Nigeria include: monitoring conflict situations helps to deal with conflict situations under the right atmosphere (with $\bar{x} = 3.37$ and $\bar{x} = 3.05$ respectively) in item 10, avoidance helps in avoiding unnecessary stressors that affects daily work flows ($\bar{x} = 3.35$ and $\bar{x} = 2.89$ respectively) in item 13, avoiding conflicts gives more time to adequately assess the situation and know how best to approach the

situation ($\bar{x} = 3.30$ and $\bar{x} = 2.75$ respectively) in item 11, avoidance aids in the elimination of activities that can negatively affect the school community ($\bar{x} = 3.28$ and $\bar{x} = 2.81$ respectively) in item 14, avoiding conflict situations helps deescalate conflicts ($\bar{x} = 3.26$ and $\bar{x} = 2.87$ respectively) in item 12, bringing together involved parties of a conflict for a talk eliminates the possible conflict escalation ($\bar{x} = 3.21$ and $\bar{x} = 2.86$ respectively) in item 9, while the least was clarifying issues before they escalate fosters university development ($\bar{x} = 3.19$ and $\bar{x} = 3.00$ respectively) in item 8. Furthermore the grand mean scores of 3.28 and 2.89 indicates that items 8-14 goes to how avoidance strategy impact on the development of federal and state universities in South-South Nigeria.

Test of Hypotheses

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

Table 3: Summary of Pearson Correlations between collaboration strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria

		Collaboration Strategies	Development of Universities	Decision
Collaboration Strategies	Pearson Correlation	1	.635**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000*	Rejected
	N	867	867	
Development of Universities	Pearson Correlation	.635**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000*		
	N	867	867	

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

Table 3 shows a Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) of .635** which indicates a relationship between collaboration strategy and the development of Universities in South-South Nigeria. This means that collaboration strategy contributes to the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. In other words, approximately 62% of the observed changes in the development of universities in South-South Nigeria are caused by collaboration strategy, thereby leaving 38% changes to be caused by other variables that are extraneous to collaboration strategy. This implies that collaboration strategy was a strong predictor that would tend to influence the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. Similarly, the result also shows that the correlation between collaboration strategy and development of universities in South-South Nigeria is statistically significant at .000 ($p < 0.05$ level of significance). Accordingly, hypothesis 1 was rejected because the study revealed that there is significant relationship between collaboration strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.

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

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

		Avoidance Strategy	Development of Universities	Decision
Avoidance Strategy	Pearson Correlation	1	.734**	Rejected
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000*	
	N	867	867	
Development of Universities	Pearson Correlation	.734**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000*		
	N	867	867	

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

Table 4 shows a Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) of .734 which indicates a relationship between avoidance strategy and the development of Universities in South-South Nigeria. This means that avoidance strategy contributed 70.9% to the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. In other words, approximately 70.9% of the observed changes in the development of universities in South-South Nigeria are caused by avoidance strategy, thereby leaving 20.1% changes to be caused by other variables that are extraneous to avoidance strategy. This implies that the avoidance strategy was a strong predictor that would tend to influence the development of universities in South-South Nigeria. Similarly, the result also shows that the correlation between avoidance strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria is statistically significant at .000 ($p < 0.05$ level of significance). Consequently, hypothesis 2 was rejected because the study revealed that there is significant relationship between avoidance strategy and the development of universities in South-South Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

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

The result in Table 2 revealed grand mean scores of 3.25 and 2.92 which indicates that how collaboration strategy impact on the development of both federal and state universities in South-South Nigeria include: effective communication amongst staff as a means of collaboration engenders university development, collaboration leads to maximum productivity, collaboration reduces work tension amongst staff, collaboration reduces unhealthy competition amongst staff, collaboration gets job done faster, collaboration engenders cooperation in the university community, and collaboration within the various relationships that exist in the university community engenders university development. This finding is in agreement with the earlier finding by Cheta-Maclean and Tobins (2023) that collaboration is effective conflict management strategy that is instituted to bring about effective communication, shared decision making process, regular feedback, and timely settlement or resolution of clashes or skirmishes that would lead to effective communication, timely work accomplishment, healthy competition, and maximum productivity amongst staff in the university community.

The study aligns with this finding in that collaboration enthrones teamwork, alliance or cooperation that is expected to exist among staff thereby, stimulating and enhancing their resourcefulness, team spirit, efficient job performance and service delivery among other issues that facilitates university development. This aligns with the position of Ololube (2024) that

collaboration stems as a premeditated and procedural conflict management and resolution strategy that is integrated in order to build a positive, harmonious and progressive relationship amongst contending or disputing members or parties (staff) in institutions (like universities) in Nigeria. This implies that collaboration suffices as a conflict management strategy that will promote the integration of effective and functional communication, ethical behaviour and rationality among employees or staff that would eventually affect the overall employee and employers morale and productivity in especially public universities (both federal and state).

In addition, the finding of the present study buttresses the effectiveness of institutionalizing collaboration as a conflict management strategy helps legalize or legitimate the seamless conduct of academic and co-curricular activities alongside, the disbursement and management of resources (like fund, materials, personnel among others) that would enhance the maintenance of facilities, stocking of materials, remuneration of personnel, assessing and publication of adequate materials, books, and journals. Including other documents or official publication that could be referenced and accessed by students and researchers in order to enhance the quality of the academic programmes that are delivered or offered in such citadel of learning (like universities). This implies that the university management's effective utilization of collaboration as a conflict management strategy would enhance the continued organization and conduct of programmes and activities in such a manner that it depicts transparency and professionalism in speedily providing the measures that would facilitate the development of universities in South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria.

Hence, this researcher's standpoint on the importance of collaboration as a conflict management strategy help to foster a cordial work environment that would help fund and provide current materials including timely replacing and maintaining facilities that meets users (lecturers, students and researchers) expectation of comfort while studying, learning, accessing information that could enhance their knowledge, skill, professionalism and entrepreneurship. This standpoint aligns with the position of Cheta-Maclean and Tobins (2023) that collaboration is an appropriately managed conflict strategy that would effectively promote teamwork, open interaction, rationality, effective communication, feedback and effective decision making in universities.

Furthermore, the result in Table 5 revealed a Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) of .635 and p -value of .000, which indicates a positive, strong and significant relationship between collaboration strategy and the development of Universities in South-South Nigeria. This finding is consistent with. In addition the result aligned with Onyekwere (2024) that collaboration strategy stems as an effective conflict management procedure adopted to ensure and enhance cordial relationship, entreaty among humans, and the existence of effective cooperation in order to reduce tension, stress and the frustration that could heighten clashes or skirmishes likely to affect the performance, productivity and development in the university system.

Hence, the result in this study implies that as collaboration strategy continue to increase then the development of universities in South-South Nigeria between 2010 and 2020 would be strongly and correspondingly influenced thereby resulting to alternative dispute resolution, collective bargaining, teamwork, effective communication, healthy competition, cooperation, and maximum productivity among staff and the university community in South-South Nigeria. This aligns with the position of Cheta-Maclean and Tobins (2023) that appropriately managed conflict stimulates the existence of collaboration with the propensity to increase open and effective communication, feedback and effective decision making. Alluding to this, Fisher et al. (2011) stated instituting collaboration as an effective conflict resolution strategy intensifies focus

on the sharing of information and identification of issues and options for timely settlement. While Ololube (2024) ascribed collaboration as an effective procedure for collective bargaining, teamwork, building a positive relationship and effective communication between the parties that would have otherwise being in dispute, disagreements or conflicts in the university.

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

The result in Table 3 revealed grand mean scores of 3.28 and 2.89 which indicates that how avoidance strategy impact on the development of both federal and state universities in South-South Nigeria include: monitoring conflict situations helps to deal with conflict situations under the right atmosphere, avoidance helps in avoiding unnecessary stressors that affects daily work flows, avoiding conflicts gives more time to adequately assess the situation and know how best to approach the situation, avoidance aids in the elimination of activities that can negatively affect the school community, avoiding conflict situations helps deescalate conflicts, bringing together involved parties of a conflict for a talk eliminates the possible conflict escalation, and clarifying issues before they escalate fosters university development. This finding is consistent with the position of Fisher et al. (2011) that the avoidance strategy seeks to set the right atmosphere towards monitoring, deescalating, indefinitely putting off and dealing with conflict situations which accentuates the elimination of unnecessary stressors that affects daily work flows, and exclusion of activities that can negatively affect the school community.

The researcher aligns with this present finding, as avoidance strategy or avoiding conflict situations which is ascribed to assist in deescalating conditions or situations. Thus, the avoidance strategy would influence bringing together involved parties in a conflict for a talk in order to temporarily or permanently eliminate, eradicate or remove the possible triggers and issues with the propensity to escalate conflicts that would be antithetical to intensify the underdevelopment of universities in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Although, those who are said to actively avoid conflict situations would frequently have low esteem or hold a position of low authority or power. However, in some circumstances, avoidance strategy is often tainted to be a conflict resolution strategy that is only profitable for the university management in their quest of delaying or ignoring situations and pointers towards the escalation of conflict that could affect the development of universities in the study area.

However, the result in Table 6 revealed a Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) of .734 and p -value of .000, which indicates a positive, strong and significant relationship between avoidance strategy and the development of Universities in South-South Nigeria between. This finding is consistent with earlier findings of Fisher et al. (2011) that the avoidance resolution strategy could effectively serve as a profitable venture for all members of the university community (comprising management, staff, students and entrepreneurs) when the roles and contributions of each member is not ignored or avoided with its associated confrontation of conflicts that could heighten employee un productivity and university development questions. Furthermore, this finding aligns with the position of Cheta-Maclean and Tobins (2023) that the integration of avoidance conflict resolution strategy would soothe, appease or conciliate disputing parties by delaying conflict in order to adequately give university management more time to effectively assess the situation and figure out the best way to approach conflict situation through the promotion of open and effective communication, feedback and effective decision making in universities in Nigeria.

Hence, the result of this study implies that as avoidance strategy continue to increase then the development of universities in South-South Nigeria would be strongly and correspondingly influenced thereby resulting to alternative dispute resolution, collective bargaining, collaboration, effective communication, healthy competition, cooperation, and maximum productivity among staff and the university community in South-South Nigeria. This standpoint also aligns with the position of Oloolube (2024) that delaying or ignoring conflict stems as avoidance conflict resolution strategy that would focus on settlement and the integration of open-ended conciliation or reconciliation process and procedure that aids in building a seemingly positive communication, relationship and teamwork spirit among university community members or parties even when a disputing or conflicting situation arises or exists.

CONCLUSION

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

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

Recommendations

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

- Universities should ensure that effective communication and collaboration exist in the system in order reduce work tension, unhealthy competition, quick job accomplishment, and level of cooperation that would enhance the development of the university community.
- University should endeavour to set functional systems that would help to mediate, resolve and clarify issues among staff rather than circumventing processes that overtime could result in the escalation of issues in such a way that it becomes antithetical to university development.
- University management should cautiously adopt the avoidance conflict resolution strategy in order not to cross the line of not democratizing the university system alongside not infringing on the freedom and rights of members of the university community in the quest to realize a peaceful and harmonious work environment.

- This approach would lead to jettisoning negative conflict resolution strategies that abhors intervention meetings with contending persons in the guise of covering conflicts that could culminate to disparagements and litigation that is antithetical to sustainable development in any university.

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