





Causes and curbing strategies for students' conflicts in higher learning institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract— This study examined the causes and strategies for curbing student conflicts in Nigeria's higher learning institutions. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and a stratified sampling technique was employed to select six higher institutions. An appropriate sampling technique was used to sample 650 students from the selected institutions in Nigeria. This study employed a questionnaire adapted from Ambrose and Veronica and Kenand Liu, and its validity and reliability were acceptable (0.62). It used ANOVA and t-test statistical tools to test the null hypotheses. The findings revealed a significant difference in the sources of students' conflicts based on institution type. There was no significant difference in the strategies adopted for curbing students' conflicts based on institution type. There was no significant difference in the sources of students' conflicts based on gender, and there was no significant difference in the strategies adopted for curbing students' conflicts based on gender. This study recommended that appropriate curbing techniques be adopted to eliminate student conflicts.

Keywords: Causes, Curbing strategies, Higher learning institutions, Students' conflicts

To cite this article (APA): Rakiya, M. A., & Bibire, H. A. (2024). Causes and curbing strategies for students' conflicts in higher learning institutions in Nigeria. *International Journal of Studies in Psychology*, 4(2), 31-35. <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijpspy.v4i2.1215>

I. INTRODUCTION

SCHOOL is a formal organisation set up to achieve desirable goals and objectives. Every school aims to produce well-integrated and disciplined citizens who will be helpful to themselves and society (Dauda, 2021). Conflicts have occurred due to differences in faiths, beliefs, philosophies, thoughts, perceptions, ideologies, ethnicity, interests, and opinions. Meanwhile, conflict occurs wherever incompatible activities occur such that benefits to one side come out at the expense of the other (Ambrose & Veronica, 2014). Abdulrahman (2001) opined that conflict is unavoidable in people's lives; it is a part of growth and development as individuals live with it, learn it, make choices, and seek to transform it reasonably and creatively, or they can live in it and allow it to undermine objectives or become destructive. This implies that direct or indirect conflict plays a significant role in human relations, and it will depend on how such conflict is managed. Ubi (2007) stated that conflicts are part and parcel of human's existence. He explained further that disagreements among people are natural as people must disagree to agree, and contrarily, it becomes logical that they should agree to disagree. This means that such agreement or disagreement does not result in conflict.

Foundation Coalition (2003 cited in Dauda, 2021) pointed out that conflict may be described as a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals. Okotoni and Okotoni (2003) listed sharing of scarce resources, interdependency, incompatible personalities, competition for scarce resources, personality clashes, negligence of duty by some officials, poor condition of service, compulsory retirement, and indiscipline among others too numerous to mention the sources or causes of conflict. According to Kirkwood (2002), different types of conflict commonly found in organisations include structural, interest, data, and relationship conflicts. Conflict can lead to

disputes, grievances, lawsuits, complaints, strikes, and disciplinary actions.

In the same vein, if education is to be managed effectively and efficiently for sustainable peace and harmony in economic and mental development among Nigerian citizens, then education at all levels (primary, secondary, and higher education) should be managed free of conflict (Ambrose & Veronica, 2014). Conflicts are bound to occur and be resolved in any working organisation, such as schools. It is worth noting that if conflicts are not properly resolved or managed, it will be difficult to accomplish the set aims and objectives of the organisation as most of the activities therein would be highly jeopardised. The extent to which a conflict is resolved depends upon how the parties perceive their negotiated gains and losses during bargaining to be relatively equitable (Omoluabi, 1995, cited in Ambrose & Veronica, 2014). Conflict resolution is the process or method of facilitating interpersonal communication to get parties to a conflict and reduce the differences in their ideals and perceptions through arbitration, bargaining, and negotiation.

According to Bannon and Paul (2003), conflict resolution encompasses non-violent resistance measures by conflicting parties to promote effective resolution. Similarly, conflict resolution is attempting to settle a dispute or a conflict. Successful conflict resolution occurs by listening to and providing opportunities to meet all parties' needs and adequately address interests so each party is satisfied with the outcome (Weaver, 2003). According to Dupe (1999), cited in Dauda (2021), the various forms of conflict include intra-personal, interpersonal, intra-groups, inter-group, and intra-organisational conflict. Secondary school students can be directly or indirectly involved in these conflicts. Intrapersonal conflict occurs in individuals, and it usually leads to psychological stress. Any student who experiences this type of conflict can be a source of trouble in a school environment because they usually create crises at any time. According to Dubin and Rose (1995), cited in Dauda (2021), there are three basic kinds of conflict, namely: task conflict, which implies disagreement about the substance of discussion

to how a task is to be accomplished interpersonal conflict, which connotes personality clash which may take the form of making antagonistic remarks on the personal characteristics of other group member and procedure conflict which implies disagreement on the procedures to be adopted in accomplishing organisational goals and objectives.

As posited by Esquived and Kleiner (1997), cited in Dauda (2021), positive effects of conflict include but are not limited to the following: it promotes constructive competition, helps in analytic thinking, helps organisational development and encourages more dedication and commitment to organisational goals and objectives. Contrariwise, the negative effects of conflicts include lack of cooperation, blockage in communication, distrust, loss of friendship, and development of enmity. According to Msila (2012), conflict can be resolved using various methods and strategies, which include dialogue, training and re-training of students on the negative effects of conflicts, cooperation among individuals, negotiation, a fair reward system, resources available judiciously allocated, provision of facilities to reduce conflicts for example, sufficient and enough classrooms, sports pitches or equipment, institutionalising effective communication as a way of giving every student a sense of belonging.

Considering the preceding statement, a series of empirical studies have been carried out on students-related conflict and gender; for instance, Brahnam, Margavio, Hignite, Barrier, and Chin (2005) found that females may possess more effective conflict resolution attributes than their males' counterparts. Males were typically found to be more avoidant of conflict than females. As avoidance is considered more disruptive in the conflict resolution process than collaboration is helpful. In the same vein, several studies have revealed that any increase in the female population in an organisation may have the potential to decrease conflict and reduce aggressive behaviours simply by being present during conflicts due to the perceived influence of stereotypical gender roles. Gender roles are theoretical constructs of learned patterns of behaviours encompassing norms that are socially appropriate for a certain gender within a specific culture. The masculine behavioural norms typically displayed by males tend to escalate tension in conflict situations (Lindsey, 2015). These masculine behaviours also often increase individual aggression during conflict (Loosemore & Galea, 2008).

Similarly, several studies on conflict management styles across genders have been conducted by different writers. For instance, Holt and Devore (2005) found that males were more competitive, and females were more compromising, per self-reported data from the TKI. More so, studies on conflict styles across genders indicate that males and females manage conflict differently. Most of these studies have measured conflict management propensities in the five abovementioned styles. Other studies suggested that women tended to be more accommodating, compromising, and avoiding. Another study found that female students were more likely to employ a collaborative conflict resolution style, and females were less avoidant of conflict overall. More recent studies have supported the theory that male and female individuals manage conflict differently. However, the specifics of these differences have not been entirely consistent with earlier research. For example, the results of Prause and Mujtaba's study suggesting that males are more dominating and use more competitive methods than females were inconsistent with previous results of Gbadamosi, Baghestan, and Al-Mabrouk (2014) Gbadamosi et al. study was consistent with Brahnam et al. (2005) study regarding the tendency for male students to be more avoidant of conflict overall. Therefore, although there appear to be some inconsistencies regarding how males and females differ in conflict management, research consistently reinforces the suggestion that gender differences exist.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to examine causes and strategies for curbing students' conflict in higher learning institutions in Nigeria.

Specifically, it examines

1. The causes of students' conflict in higher learning institutions in Nigeria
2. The strategies adopted for curbing students' conflicts in higher learning institutions in Nigeria
3. Differences in the causes of students' conflict by male and female students of higher learning institutions in Nigeria
4. Differences in the strategies adopted for curbing students' conflict by male and female students of higher learning institutions in Nigeria.

III. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested to sharpen the focus of this study.

HO¹: There is no significant difference in the causes of students' conflict based on institution type.

HO²: There is no significant difference in the strategies adopted for curbing students' conflict based on institution type.

HO³: There is no significant difference in the causes of students' conflict between male and female students in higher learning institutions.

HO⁴: There is no significant difference in the strategies adopted for curbing students' conflict between male and female students in higher learning institutions.

IV. METHODS

Research approach, paradigm, and design

This study adopted a quantitative approach through a descriptive survey design. A stratified sampling technique was employed to select six (6) higher learning institutions in the selected two states in Nigeria, Kano and Jigawa states. Three higher institutions were selected in each state: university, polytechnic, and college. A proportionate sampling technique was used to sample Six hundred and fifty (650) students in the selected institutions in Nigeria. The proportionate sampling technique was used in line with Sambo (2008), who posited that the best procedure for selecting a sample from an unequal population is the proportionate sampling technique.

Data collection instruments

An adapted questionnaire from Ambrose and Veronica (2014) and Kenand Liu (2010) on the courses and curbing strategies for students' conflict was adopted to elicit information from the respondents (students). The instrument contained two sections: A and B. Section A contained demographic data of the respondents, namely gender and institution type. In contrast, section B consists of the questionnaire items that embedded the main variables of interest in this study (i.e., causes and strategies for curbing student-related conflict). It was validated by psychologists through face and content validity. A test re-test method of reliability was adopted, and the data was analysed using the Pearson Product Correlation Coefficient statistical tool. A reliability coefficient of 0.62 was recorded. The instrument was administered to the respondents by the researchers with the assistance of five (5) trained research assistants.

Data analysis

The data collected were analysed using SPSS software (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences 21 version).

Description of ANOVA as a justification for its usage in this study: It is a statistical technique used to compare the means of more than two groups or levels of an independent variable. It is a measure of the variability of a test of numerical values. It is a process of testing the differences among different data groups for homogeneity. It is used when the dependent variable is continuous, and the independent variable is nominal or categorical (Daramola, 2015).

Description of T-test as a justification for its usage in this study: The t-test is a parametric statistical test that allows a researcher to compare two means to determine whether a set or sets of data (scores) are from the same population. It is one of the probabilities that the difference

between the means is a real difference rather than a chance difference. The t-test is a powerful test for comparing two sample means (Jimoh, 2015).

Ethical consideration

Informed consent from the respondents before the administration of the instrument and data collection, ensuring they understand the purpose and benefits of the study, was adhered to; confidentiality: respondents' anonymity and confidentiality were safeguarded by removing identifying information from the instrument and ensuring secure storage; voluntary participation: respondents were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty; ethical approval must be sought from relevant ethics committees or institutional review boards (school management) before commencing data collection.

V. RESULTS

The formulated null hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested using ANOVA, while 3 and 4 were tested using t-test statistical tools at a 0.05 significance level.

Hypotheses testing

The formulated null hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested using ANOVA, while 3 and 4 were tested using a t-test statistical tool at a 0.05 significance level.

There is no significant difference in the causes of students' conflicts based on institution type.

Table 1: ANOVA Results showing the analysis of the significant difference in the causes of students' conflicts based on institution type

Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	Cal. F ratio	F	Sig
Between Groups	81.801	2	40.901	1.525	.003
Within Groups	17348.853	647	26.814		
Total	17430.654	649			

The results in Table 1 show that the F-value 1.525 is obtained with a p-value of .003 computed at 0.05 alpha levels. Since the p-value of .003 is lesser than 0.05 level of significance, null hypothesis 1 is rejected while alternative hypothesis 1 is accepted ($F_{1.5251}=.003, p<0.05$). Therefore, there is a significant difference in the causes of students' conflicts based on institution type (University, Polytechnic, and College of Education). It implies a significant difference in the causes of students' conflict based on institution type (University, Polytechnic, and College of Education) because different strategies will work effectively in different schools due to the peculiarity of each school in terms of students' conflict. There is no significant difference in the strategies adopted for curbing students' conflicts based on institution type (University, Polytechnic, and College of Education).

Table 2: ANOVA Results showing the analysis of the significant difference in the strategies adopted for curbing students' conflicts based on institution type

Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	Cal. F ratio	F	Sig
Between Groups	83.652	2	41.826	.824	.439
Within Groups	32850.188	647	50.773		
Total	32933.840	649			

Table 2 shows that the f-value .824 is obtained with a p-value of .439 computed at 0.05 alpha levels. Since the p-value of .439 is higher than the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis 2 is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the strategies adopted for curbing student-related conflicts based on institution types, such as university, polytechnic, and college of education ($f_{.824} = .439, p>0.05$). It implies that there is no significant difference in the strategies adopted for curbing students' conflict based on institution type because strategies adopted in higher learning institutions apply to any tertiary learning institution irrespective of school type.

There is no significant difference in the causes of students' conflicts between male and female students of higher learning institutions.

Table 3: t-test statistics showing the difference in the causes of students' conflicts between male and female students of higher learning institutions

Extent of student-related conflict	Grading	Frequency	Percentage
Rarely Occurred	16-32	3	.5%
Occasionally Occurred	33-49	138	21.2%
Frequently Occurred	50-66	509	78.3%
Total		650	100%

*significance at $p>0.05$

Table 3 shows that the t-value .250 is obtained with a p-value of .802 computed at 0.05 alpha levels. Since the p-value of .802 is higher than the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis 3 is accepted. Therefore, there would be no significant difference in the causes of student-related conflict between male and female students of higher learning institutions ($t_{.250} = .802, p>0.05$). Therefore, it could be inferred from the analysis that there would be no significant difference in the causes of student-related conflicts between male and female students of higher learning institutions because they are exposed to the same treatment irrespective of gender.

There is no significant difference in the strategies adopted for curbing students' conflicts between male and female students of higher learning institutions.

Table 4: t-test statistics showing the difference in the strategies adopted for curbing students' conflicts between male and female students of higher learning institutions

Gender	No	Mean	S. D.	Df	t-value	Sig	Remark
Male	358	53.6229	5.14389				
Female	292	53.5205	5.23761	648	.250	.802	Accepted

*Significance at $p>0.05$

Table 4 shows that the t-value .756 is obtained with a p-value of .450 computed at 0.05 alpha levels. Since the p-value of .450 is higher than the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis 4 is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the strategies adopted for curbing student-related conflicts by male and female students of higher learning institutions ($t_{.756} = .450, p>0.05$). It could, therefore, be inferred from the analysis that there would be no significant difference in the strategies adopted for curbing students' conflicts by male and female students of higher learning institutions because of the effectiveness of the strategies adopted for curbing students' conflicts in higher learning institutions irrespective of school nature.

VI. DISCUSSION

Results of the study show that, out of 650 sampled respondents, few respondents strongly agreed that student-related conflict rarely occurred in the Nigerian tertiary, which means that student-related conflict in Nigerian higher learning institutions is extremely low. The same result further indicates that some respondents sampled strongly agreed that student-related conflict occasionally occurred in Nigerian higher learning institutions. In contrast, most respondents concurred that student-related conflict frequently occurred in Nigerian higher learning institutions. It implied that most respondents sampled for this study strongly agreed that student-related conflict frequently occurred in Nigerian higher learning institutions.

There is a significant difference in the causes of student-related conflicts based on institution type (University, Polytechnic, and College of Education). It implies a significant difference in the causes of student-related conflicts based on institution type (University, Polytechnic, and College of Education). Different strategies will work effectively in different schools due to the nature of the schools and their peculiarity in the causes of conflicts. There is no significant difference in the strategies adopted for curbing student-related conflicts based on institution type, such as university, polytechnic, and college of education. It implies no significant difference in the strategies adopted for curbing student-related conflicts based on institution type because strategies adopted in one higher learning institution apply to all other tertiary learning institutions.

There is no significant difference in the causes of student-related conflicts between male and female students of higher learning institutions. It could, therefore, be inferred from the analysis that there would be no significant difference in the causes of student-related

conflicts between male and female students of higher learning institutions because both male and female students of higher learning institutions are exposed to the same causes of conflicts irrespective of gender. There is no significant difference in the strategies adopted for curbing student-related conflicts by male and female students of higher learning institutions. It could, therefore, be inferred from the analysis that there would be no significant difference in the strategies adopted for curbing student-related conflicts among male and female students of higher learning institutions in Nigeria. This finding contradicts Brahnam et al. (2005), who found a significant difference in male and female conflict resolution strategies; females possess more effective conflict resolution attributes than their male counterparts. Contrariwise, men were typically found to be more avoidant of conflict than women. Collaboration is helpful as avoidance is considered more disruptive in the conflict resolution. In the same vein, several studies have revealed that any increase in the female population in the construction industry may have the potential to decrease conflict and reduce aggressive behaviours simply by being present during conflicts due to the perceived influence of stereotypical gender roles. Gender roles are theoretical constructs of learned patterns of behaviours encompassing norms that are socially appropriate for a certain gender within a specific culture. The masculine behavioural norms typically displayed by males tend to escalate tension in conflict situations (Lindsey, 2015). These masculine behaviours also often increase individual aggression during conflict (Loosemore & Galea, 2008).

Similarly, Holt and Devore (2005) found that males were more competitive, and females were more compromising, per self-reported data. Another study found that female students were more likely to employ a collaborative conflict resolution style and determined that females were less avoidant of conflict overall. More studies have continued to support the theory that male and female individuals manage conflict differently, although the specifics of these differences have not been entirely consistent with other research. Again, Prause and Mujtaba's revealed that males dominate and use more competitive methods than females. This finding does not align with the results of Gbadamosi et al. (2014), Gbadamosi et al. study was consistent with Brahnam et al. (2005) study regarding the tendency for male students to be more avoidant of conflict overall. Therefore, although there appear to be some inconsistencies regarding how males and females differ in conflict management, research consistently reinforces the suggestion that gender differences exist.

VII. CONCLUSION

Based on the information collected, analysed, and interpreted, the study concluded that there is a significant difference in the causes of students' conflicts based on institution type (University, Polytechnic, and College of Education); there is no significant difference in the strategies adopted for curbing students' conflicts based on institution type such as university, polytechnic, and college of education, there is no significant difference in the causes of students' conflicts by male and female students of higher learning institution, and there is no significant difference in the strategies adopted for curbing students' conflicts by male and female students of higher learning institutions.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that appropriate curbing techniques should be adopted to eliminate students' conflicts in the higher learning institutions in Nigeria; the school management should give proper and periodic orientation on the aftermath effects of students' conflicts on the students' academic career; and enabling, the conducive and secure learning environment should be provided by the school management to eliminate conflicts among students in the higher learning institutions in Nigeria.

IX. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest in this paper.

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