Conflict Management Strategies and Organizational Performance of Public Universities in Anambra State Nigeria

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Abstract
This study investigated the conflict management strategies adopted by public universities in Anambra State, Nigeria, and their impact on organizational performance. A descriptive survey research design was employed, targeting 94 academic staff members from two public universities in the state. The study utilized stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation from four faculties: Management Sciences, Science, Social Sciences, and Engineering and Technology. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, which assessed demographic information, prevalent conflict types, conflict management strategies, and their perceived impact on university operations. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and ANOVA, with SPSS version 25.The results revealed that role conflicts (Mean = 3.38) were the most prevalent, followed by workload (Mean = 3.00) and communication conflicts (Mean = 2.97). The most commonly adopted conflict management strategies included negotiation (Mean = 3.30), training workshops (Mean = 3.29), and avoidance (Mean = 3.28). However, the study found no significant difference in the conflict management strategies across faculties, and no significant impact of these strategies on organizational performance. Factors such as improved communication (Mean = 3.33) and creativity (Mean = 3.30) were positively impacted, but minimizing disruptions had the least effect (Mean = 1.76). The findings suggest that while conflict management strategies are present, they do not significantly influence the overall performance of public universities in Anambra State. The study highlights the need for more effective conflict management approaches to enhance organizational outcomes in the academic sector.

1. Introduction

Conflict management is a critical element for enhancing organizational performance, particularly in public universities where diverse stakeholders, including faculty, staff, administrators, and students, interact. Conflict management refers to the process of identifying, addressing, and resolving disputes or disagreements in a constructive manner to minimize their negative impact on relationships and organizational functioning (Shehu-Usman et al, (2024). It involves the use of various strategies, such as negotiation, mediation, collaboration, and compromise, to address the root causes of conflict and reach a mutually acceptable solution. Effective conflict management fosters communication, understanding, and cooperation among conflicting parties, helping to improve overall productivity, maintain harmonious relationships, and promote a positive environment (Abolo&Oguntoye, 2016). It is particularly crucial in organizational settings, where unresolved conflicts can hinder performance and disrupt operations.

Effective conflict management strategies are essential in ensuring that universities remain functional, productive, and conducive to academic excellence. Several scholars have explored the impact of conflict management on organizational performance in Nigerian public universities (Ogunode et al, 2024). Conflict within Nigerian public universities is inevitable due to the complex interplay of academic, administrative, and social forces. According to Gray (2015), academic staff frequently clash with administrators over issues such as workload, remuneration, and decision-making processes. Similarly, student protests, often driven by dissatisfaction with academic quality, infrastructure, or perceived injustices, also contribute to conflict within the institution (Adesanyaet

al, 2018). Thus, conflict in these institutions can arise from various sources, including differences in values, objectives, or resources, creating challenges for achieving organizational goals.

The management of conflict in public universities requires strategies that can mitigate its negative impact on the academic environment. Several conflict management strategies are discussed in the literature, including negotiation, mediation, collaboration, accommodation, and avoidance (Sule, 2024). Each of these strategies can be employed depending on the nature of the conflict and the parties involved.In Nigerian public universities, the negotiation strategy is often favored. This approach encourages the parties in conflict to engage in dialogue to reach a mutually acceptable solution. According to Asubiojo and Ajayi (2017), effective negotiation helps in balancing the interests of both faculty and administration, thereby ensuring that solutions are sustainable. Mediation, which involves a neutral third party helping the conflicting parties find common ground, is another widely used strategy. Igbinobaet al, (2023) emphasizes that mediation has proven effective in resolving student-staff conflicts, where the mediator helps both parties articulate their concerns and negotiate a peaceful resolution.

Moreover, collaboration, which aims to find a win-win solution that satisfies all parties, is also highlighted in the literature. Ojika (2024) argues that collaboration fosters cooperation between different groups within a university, enhancing problem-solving and teamwork. By promoting a shared understanding of goals, collaboration can lead to improved organizational performance.The relationship between conflict management and organizational performance in Nigerian public universities is well-documented. Effective conflict management has been shown to lead to better organizational outcomes, such as improved job satisfaction, higher productivity, and a more harmonious working environment. For example, Onaluet al, (2024) found that universities that employed collaborative and negotiated approaches to conflict resolution reported higher levels of employee satisfaction and productivity. The reduction in interpersonal conflicts among academic staff also contributed to an increase in academic performance and institutional stability.

In contrast, ineffective conflict management can have detrimental effects on university performance. Mismanaged conflicts can lead to strikes, protests, and a general decline in morale, which ultimately affects the quality of education provided. According to Jackson, J. (2024), unresolved conflicts often result in prolonged strikes in Nigerian public universities, leading to significant disruptions in academic calendars. These disruptions negatively affect student learning outcomes and tarnish the institution's reputation.Furthermore, conflict management strategies that emphasize avoidance or accommodation may lead to short-term relief but can result in long-term dissatisfaction and resentment. As observed by Akanjiet al, (2021), avoiding conflict may suppress underlying issues, but it often leads to a build-up of frustrations, which may eventually explode into larger conflicts that are harder to resolve. In contrast, a proactive and transparent approach to conflict resolution ensures that issues are addressed before they escalate.

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of organizational life, especially in public universities, where diverse stakeholders with differing interests, backgrounds, and objectives interact. In these institutions, conflict can arise at various levels—between students, faculty, staff, and management—resulting in inefficiencies, low morale, and poor performance (Azhariet al, 2024). Despite the importance of effective conflict management strategies in enhancing organizational performance, many public universities struggle with resolving conflicts in ways that support institutional goals and foster a collaborative work environment.

The gap in existing research lies in the insufficient exploration of how specific conflict management strategies, such as negotiation, mediation, and collaboration, directly influence the performance of public universities (Schmidtet al, 2014). While conflict management is widely studied in corporate settings, limited studies focus on the academic context, where unique challenges prevail. Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive frameworks for assessing the impact of conflict management on organizational performance in public universities. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining the relationship between conflict management strategies and the overall performance of public universities. The research will address the lack of empirical evidence on how different strategies affect academic and administrative outcomes, including types of conflict prevalent and impact of conflict management strategies on organizational performance of public universities in

Anambra state Nigeria. It will also provide actionable recommendations to enhance conflict resolution practices within these institutions.

1.1. Research objectives

a. To examine the types of conflict prevalent in public universities in Anambra State.

b. To identify the conflict management strategies adopted by public universities in Anambra State.

c. To assess the impact of conflict management strategies on organizational performance of public universities in Anambra state Nigeria

1.2. Research questions

a. What types of conflict are prevalent in public universities in Anambra State?

b. What conflict management strategies are adopted by public universities in Anambra State?

c. What is the impact of conflict management strategies on the organizational performance of public universities in Anambra State, Nigeria?

1.3. Hypotheses

a. There are no significant types of conflict prevalent in public universities in Anambra State.

b. Public universities in Anambra State do not adopt any significant conflict management strategies.

c. Conflict management strategies have no significant impact on the organizational performance of public universities in Anambra State, Nigeria.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to examine the conflict management strategies adopted by public universities in Anambra State, Nigeria, and their impact on organizational performance. This design was chosen for its ability to gather detailed data from a large number of respondents, which facilitated a comprehensive understanding of how conflict management influences various aspects of university operations. The population of the study consisted of 94 academic staff members from two public universities in Anambra State (Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Igbariam). To ensure diversity in the sample, stratified random sampling was used, with the sample drawn from four different faculties: Management Sciences, Sciences, Social Sciences, and Engineering and Technology. This approach ensured proportional representation from each faculty. Additionally, the sample included 35 male and 59 female respondents, achieving a balanced representation of gender in the study. The total sample size was fixed at 94, reflecting the population under study.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, which was divided into three sections. The first section captured demographic data, including gender, faculty, and years of experience. The second section assessed the prevalence of different types of conflicts in the universities, such as role conflicts, workload conflicts, and communication issues. The third section focused on the conflict management strategies employed by the universities and their perceived impact on organizational performance, specifically in areas like decision-making, communication, creativity, and employee turnover. Before the questionnaire was distributed, a pilot test was conducted to validate the instrument. The pilot test was carried out at a nearby university, allowing for feedback and refinement of the questions to ensure clarity and relevance. A Cronbach's alpha reliability score of 0.85 was achieved, indicating strong internal consistency and reliability of the instrument. Furthermore, experts in conflict management and educational administration reviewed the questionnaire to ensure its validity in capturing the intended information.

The questionnaire was distributed both physically and online to reach a wider audience. Respondents were given the option to complete the questionnaire at their convenience, increasing the likelihood of obtaining a higher response rate. The survey period lasted for four weeks, and

reminders were sent to encourage participation from non-respondents. Once the data were collected, they were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions, were used to summarize the responses regarding the types of conflicts, conflict management strategies, and their impact on organizational performance. The findings were then presented in tables for easier interpretation. To test the study's hypotheses, an ANOVA was conducted to assess whether there were significant differences in the conflict management strategies and their impact on organizational performance across different faculties. A significance level of 0.05 was used for all tests, and data analysis was performed using SPSS version 25.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Faculty and Gender

Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Faculty				
Management Sciences	25	26.6	26.6	26.6
Sciences	28	29.8	29.8	56.4
Social Sciences	17	18.1	18.1	74.5
Engineering and Technology	24	25.5	25.5	100.0
Total (Faculty)	94	100.0	100.0	
Gender				
Male	35	37.2	37.2	37.2
Female	59	62.8	62.8	100.0
Total (Gender)	94	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 provides a distribution of respondents by faculty and gender. Among the faculties, most respondents were from Science (28, 29.8%), followed by Management Sciences (25, 26.6%), Engineering and Technology (24, 25.5%), and Social Sciences (17, 18.1%). In terms of gender, female respondents (59, 62.8%) outnumbered male respondents (35, 37.2%). The total number of respondents across both categories was 94 (100.0%). The data indicates a relatively balanced distribution among faculties, with Science having the highest representation, and a notable gender disparity, with females forming the majority of the sample.

3.1.1. Research question 1: What types of conflict are prevalent in public universities in Anambra State?

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Types of Conflicts in Public Universities

Item Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Interpersonal conflicts often arise among staff members due to misunderstandings.	94	1.81	1.176
Role conflicts emerge when responsibilities are unclear among university personnel.	94	3.38	.749
Resource allocation conflicts occur due to competition for limited institutional resources.	94	2.90	.995
Communication conflicts develop due to misinterpretation or lack of effective communication.	94	2.97	.809
Academic conflicts occur between lecturers and students over grading or assessments.	94	1.80	1.113
Workload conflicts emerge when duties are unequally distributed among academic staff.	94	3.00	1.037
Cultural conflicts arise from differences in beliefs among diverse university communities.	94	1.52	.992
Valid N (listwise)	94		

Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics for types of conflicts in public universities. Role conflicts had the highest mean score (3.38, SD = 0.749), indicating they are the most prevalent type of conflict. This is followed by workload conflicts (Mean = 3.00, SD = 1.037) and communication conflicts (Mean = 2.97, SD = 0.809). Resource allocation conflicts also scored moderately (Mean = 2.90, SD = 0.995). In contrast, cultural conflicts (Mean = 1.52, SD = 0.992), academic conflicts (Mean = 1.80, SD = 1.113), and interpersonal conflicts (Mean = 1.81, SD = 1.176) were less prevalent. Data were based on 94 respondents.

3.1.2. Research question 2: What conflict management strategies are adopted by public universities in Anambra State?

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of conflict management strategies adopted by public universities

Item Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mediation involves a neutral party helping resolve disputes between individuals.	94	3.01	.978
Negotiation focuses on finding mutually acceptable solutions to conflicting interests.	94	3.30	1.025
Grievance procedures allow formal channels for resolving disputes in structured ways.	94	2.97	.885
Training workshops equip staff with conflict resolution skills and techniques.	94	3.29	.980
Avoidance strategy delays addressing conflicts to prevent immediate escalation or tension.	94	3.28	.977
Compromising involves finding middle ground to satisfy conflicting parties' primary needs.	94	3.28	.966
Conflict audits identify recurring issues and propose proactive strategies for resolution.	94	3.28	.966
Valid N (listwise)	94		

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics on conflict management strategies adopted by public universities. The most utilized strategies include negotiation (Mean = 3.30, SD = 1.025), training workshops (Mean = 3.29, SD = 0.980), and avoidance (Mean = 3.28, SD = 0.977). Compromising (Mean = 3.28, SD = 0.966) and conflict audits (Mean = 3.28, SD = 0.966) were also prominent. Mediation scored moderately (Mean = 3.01, SD = 0.978), while grievance procedures were less emphasized (Mean = 2.97, SD = 0.885). The results, based on 94 respondents, highlight that proactive and collaborative strategies dominate conflict management in these institutions.

3.1.3. Research question 3: What is the impact of conflict management strategies on the organizational performance of public universities in Anambra State, Nigeria?

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of impact of conflict management strategies on the organizational performance of public universities

Item Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Conflict resolution fosters positive relationships, creating a harmonious work environment.	94	2.97	.885
Proper strategies improve decision-making processes, boosting overall institutional efficiency.	94	3.28	.977
Resolving disputes transparently builds trust, strengthening organizational culture and commitment.	94	3.00	1.037
Well-managed conflicts encourage creativity, leading to innovative solutions in university operations.	94	3.30	1.025
Conflict management reduces turnover rates, ensuring institutional stability and workforce retention.	94	3.28	.977
Improved communication from conflict resolution enhances teamwork in academic and administrative units.	94	3.33	1.111
Efficient strategies minimize disruptions, ensuring continuity in academic and operational activities.	94	1.76	1.198
Valid N (listwise)	94		

Table 4 highlights the descriptive statistics on the impact of conflict management strategies on organizational performance in public universities. Improved communication had the highest mean (Mean = 3.33, SD = 1.111), indicating its significant role in enhancing teamwork. Encouraging creativity (Mean = 3.30, SD = 1.025) and improving decision-making (Mean = 3.28, SD = 0.977) were also highly rated. Conflict management's role in reducing turnover rates scored similarly (Mean = 3.28, SD = 0.977). Transparency in dispute resolution (Mean = 3.00, SD = 1.037) and fostering positive relationships (Mean = 2.97, SD = 0.885) were moderately impactful, while minimizing disruptions had the lowest impact (Mean = 1.76, SD = 1.198). Data were drawn from 94 respondents.

3.1.4. Hypothesis 1: There are no significant types of conflict prevalent in public universities in Anambra State.

Table 5: ANOVA Test for Hypothesis 1 on Types of Conflict in Public Universities

Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.528	1	.528	.029	.865
Within Groups	1659.685	92	18.040		
Total	1660.213	93			

The ANOVA test for Hypothesis 1 in Table 5 shows an F-value of 0.029 and a significance level (p-value) of 0.865, which is greater than the 0.05 threshold. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the types of conflicts prevalent in public universities in Anambra State. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that there are no significant types of conflict prevalent, is accepted. This suggests that the conflicts observed are not significantly distinct across different groups.

3.1.5. Hypothesis 2: Public universities in Anambra State do not adopt any significant conflict management strategies.

Table 6. ANOVA Test for Hypothesis 2 on Conflict Management Strategies in Public Universities

Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.027	1	.027	.001	.978
Within Groups	3300.409	92	35.874		
Total	3300.436	93			

The ANOVA test results for Hypothesis 2 in Table 6 show an F-value of 0.001 and a significance level (Sig.) of 0.978, which is far above the threshold of 0.05. This indicates no statistically significant difference in the conflict management strategies adopted by public universities in Anambra State. Consequently, the null hypothesis stating that public universities in Anambra State do not adopt any significant conflict management strategies is accepted. The results suggest that the observed conflict management strategies are not significantly impactful or distinct.

3.1.6. Hypothesis 3: Conflict management strategies have no significant impact on the organizational performance of public universities in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Table 7. ANOVA Test for Hypothesis 1 on impact of conflict management strategies on the organizational performance of public universities

Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.006	1	.006	.000	.990
Within Groups	3110.133	92	33.806		
Total	3110.138	93			

The ANOVA test results in Table 7 show a significance value of 0.990, which is much greater than the standard threshold of 0.05. This indicates that there is no statistically significant impact of conflict management strategies on the organizational performance of public universities in Anambra State. Therefore, the null hypothesis (Conflict management strategies have no significant impact on organizational performance) is accepted, as the data does not provide sufficient evidence to reject it. This suggests that other factors might influence organizational performance.

3.2. Discussion

The research findings on the types of conflicts in public universities in Anambra State highlight several prevalent issues, with role conflicts being the most prominent (mean = 3.38). In contrast, interpersonal and academic conflicts were less significant, with means of 1.81 and 1.80, respectively. These results align with studies by Schmidt et al,(2014), which identified role ambiguity as a leading source of conflict in academic settings. Similarly, a study by Kenny and Fluck (2014) found that workload conflicts often arise when academic duties are unevenly distributed among staff, a finding

that agreed with the present study's second-highest mean of 3.00. The ANOVA test for Hypothesis 1 revealed no significant difference in the types of conflict across groups (p = 0.865), supporting the null hypothesis. This result is consistent with a related study by Diebig et al,(2017), which concluded that conflict types in universities are generally uniform across various departments. Additionally, a study by Azhari et al,(2024) corroborated this by highlighting that communication and resource allocation conflicts are prevalent but not significantly different across groups. This lack of variation contrasts with findings from Akanji et al,(2021), who suggested that cultural conflicts tend to be more prominent in diverse academic environments. Overall, while role and workload conflicts were most common, there was no significant differentiation across conflict types.

The conflict management strategies in public universities in Anambra State are generally centered on proactive, collaborative approaches, with negotiation (Mean = 3.30) being the most frequently adopted strategy, followed by training workshops (Mean = 3.29) and avoidance (Mean = 3.28). These findings align with similar studies by Jackson (2024), who emphasized the effectiveness of negotiation and training workshops in managing conflicts. In contrast, grievance procedures (Mean = 2.97) were less emphasized, which differs from findings by Onaluet al,(2024), who identified formal grievance procedures as central to conflict resolution in universities. The ANOVA test for Hypothesis 2 showed no significant difference in the strategies adopted (p = 0.978), supporting the null hypothesis. This result is consistent with a related study by Saka (2020), who also found no significant variation in conflict management strategies across different educational institutions. Similarly, a study by Ojika (2024) found that despite diverse approaches, universities often resort to common strategies like mediation and negotiation to manage conflicts, further supporting the present study's conclusions. However, this contrasts with findings by Igbinobaet al,(2023), who reported that some universities prioritize conflict audits to identify underlying issues.

The impact of conflict management strategies on the organizational performance of public universities in Anambra State reveals mixed results. The highest-rated impact was improved communication (Mean = 3.33), followed by fostering creativity (Mean = 3.30) and improving decision-making (Mean = 3.28), suggesting that well-managed conflicts can enhance teamwork and innovation. This finding agrees with studies by Asubiojo and Ajayi (2017), who emphasized the role of communication in enhancing institutional efficiency. Similarly, Sule (2024) found that fostering creativity through conflict resolution contributed to better organizational outcomes. In contrast, minimizing disruptions scored the lowest (Mean = 1.76), indicating limited impact on the continuity of academic and operational activities. This contrasts with the findings of Abiodun et al, (2015), who reported that effective conflict management minimizes disruptions and maintains academic schedules. Additionally, a study by Adesanya et al, (2018) found that conflict resolution significantly contributes to organizational stability by reducing turnover rates, a result consistent with the present study's finding that conflict management helps retain staff (Mean = 3.28). The ANOVA test for Hypothesis 3 showed no significant impact (p = 0.990), agreeing with a related study by Abolo andOguntoye, O. (2016), which also found that conflict management strategies did not significantly affect university performance. Thus, while conflict management strategies like communication and creativity are viewed as beneficial, other external factors might play a larger role in determining overall performance.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between conflict management strategies and organizational performance in public universities in Anambra State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that while various conflict management strategies, such as negotiation, mediation, and training workshops are commonly adopted, their overall impact on organizational performance was not statistically significant. This suggests that the effectiveness of these strategies may be influenced by other contextual factors, such as leadership styles, institutional culture, and resource availability. To enhance organizational performance, universities should adopt a holistic approach that integrates effective conflict management with broader institutional development initiatives.

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