

The Effectiveness Debate: An Assessment of the Strategies Used in Handling Students-Management Conflicts by the University for Development Studies from 1999 to 2009

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Abstract

The paper investigated the strategies used in handling students-management conflicts at the University for Development Studies from 1999 to 2009. Data collection was done with questionnaires and interview guide. Forty respondents participated in the study. Data were analyzed qualitatively. The study found that the University relied mainly on forcing/domination in handling students-management conflicts. Other frequently used strategies were: ignoring, the suspension and/or dissolution of students' unions and their executives and rustication or threat of rustication of student leaders. Integration and negotiated compromises, the closure of the University and the use of security forces (police) to maintain law and order were also used but rarely so. It was established that none of the strategies used was very effective. Just one was effective yet rarely used. Also, one was moderately effective but rarely used too. The strategies used were more regulatory and repressive. Therefore, the overall assessment of the strategies used by the University in handling the students-management conflicts was that they were less effective. The study recommended that students be given fair representation in conflict analysis and management. Also, the University should rely more on cooperative strategies and very less if at all, on regulatory and repressive strategies in handling students-management conflicts.

Key Words: Conflicts, Strategies, Effectiveness, Students, Management

1. Introduction

Ross (1993:1) argued that “the problem is not conflict per se, but how we handle or manage it”. Managing conflicts is a matter of necessity and not an option (Afful-Broni, 2012). Olajide (2011) defined conflict management as the process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity of conflict through a number of measures and by working with and through the parties involved in that conflict. For their part, Faniran & Akintayo (2012) viewed conflict management as the process of defusing antagonism and reaching an agreement between parties involved in the conflict. Referring to the principle of conflict management, Aseka (2001:22) asserted that the only true solution to conflict is one that attempts to satisfy the inherent needs of all the parties involved. Corroboratingly, Havenga & Visagie (2011) noted that organizational conflicts can be resolved if the causes of such conflicts can be found and solutions identified that satisfy all the parties involved. Havenga & Visagie added that it is only by effectively managing the origin (causes) of the conflict or handling it in a manner that is beneficial to the disputing parties and the organization that will ensure that it does not develop again. On their part, Nelson & Quick (2001:424) giving cognizance to the pervasiveness of conflict in an organization remarked that managers need to understand the many sources of conflict to be able to manage it effectively. Mayer (2008) concluded that if one can develop a useable framework for understanding the causes of conflict, a map of conflict can be created that can guide one through the conflict process.

These scholars, discussed this far seem to point to one thing—being able to identify the cause of a conflict is key to managing it effectively. Therefore, it is required of managers of organizations not only to be concerned with dealing with conflict but also to pay much more attention to discovering and understanding the origin (cause) of a conflict if a lasting solution is expected after all. The processes involved in managing conflicts are as important as the outcomes.

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It is for this reason that Ross (1993) in attempting an explanation of conflict management indicated his interest in not only the solution to the conflict but also in how the solution was arrived at. To him, the extent to which a solution to the conflict is seen as being supreme depends on how it is achieved. In his own words, Ross (1993: x) remarked appropriately that “the viability of any conflict outcome is directly related to how it is achieved. Success and failure, from this perspective, are related to the process of conflict management

ent as much as to any specific formulas the parties devise to work out their differences”. For example, participatory processes in conflict management produce a sense of ownership of the outcome which could enhance the degree of satisfaction among disputants, even though the solution might not be as exact as expected beforehand. On the contrary, imposed solutions to conflict no matter how good they might seem, could simply be viewed as alien creations and foreign impositions and as such rejected by disputants. Even when such solutions are accepted because disputants do not have the power to resist, they often do not last. Therefore, there is the need to focus attention on both the process and outcome of conflict management if success is expected. From the accounts of Akparep (2019), the University for Development Students suffered from many students-management conflicts from 1999 to 2009 with devastating outcomes for both students and management in particular, and the University as a whole. In a similar study, Akparep (2022:16) concluded the “conflicts led to low productivity and tarnished the reputation of the University despite the fact that they transformed governance of the University”. The question of how these conflicts were handled is however unanswered. Much more of interest is even the doubtful posture of Akparep (2022) that there was a reduction in the prevalence of conflicts in the University after 2009 but that the reduction of incidences could, however, not be conclusive of the effectiveness of the strategies used in managing the conflicts that occurred. Motivated by these arguments, this paper sought to investigate the strategies used in handling students-management conflicts the University for Development Studies experienced from 1999 to 2009, assess the effectiveness of these strategies in dealing with the conflicts and suggest mechanisms for controlling conflicts in the University.

2. Literature Review

2.1 A Review of Conflict Management Strategies

Argyris & Schon (1996) have noted that conflict management refers to the art of designing effective macro-level strategies to minimize the dysfunctions of conflict and enhance the constructive functions of conflict in order to improve learning and effectiveness in an organization. When people rise against the existing orders, conflicts emerge and so are lessons to learn which are good for the growth of organizations. Although some scholars use conflict management interchangeably with conflict resolution, Robbins (1978) argued that the difference between the two terms is more than semantics. Conflict resolution refers to the reduction, elimination, or termination of conflict (Omemu & Oladunjoye, 2013).

Some conflict management strategies available to managers are identified as: problem-solving, the focus on super ordinate goals, avoidance/ignoring, smoothing or obliging, compromise, authoritative command, altering the human variable, and altering structural variables. Some other scholars have noted that conflict can be handled using such strategies as problem-solving, super ordinate goals, compromise, forcing, and smoothing (Farmer & Roth, 1998; Cropanzano, et al., 1999; Robbins, 1974).

Problem-solving, also referred to as integrating, takes place when conflicting parties take time to cooperatively identify and correct the source of their conflict. Observed by Kreitner & Kinicki (2004) as good at dealing with conflicts that are complex and plagued by misunderstanding, problem-solving would have been the best option in dealing with a myriad of students-management conflicts. Problem-solving and negotiated compromising are said to be more desirable strategies for managing conflicts. They are focused on win-win outcomes; concern for self and others alike. They provide mutually acceptable lasting outcomes in conflict if well applied (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2011; Thomas, 1976) and could be considered by school management as the best options in handling students-management conflict. Forcing (dominating), smoothing (obliging), avoiding (ignoring) and the use of superordinate goals as strategies for managing conflicts are less desirable and may only temporarily fix the conflict (Rahim, 1985; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2011; Joinson, 1998; Best, 2006; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004). The choice of putting self or others first underpins the choice of a conflict management style and will often depend largely on the person’s motivation during conflict and the conflict situation itself (Omemu & Oladunjoye, 2013).

Beyond, the broader strategies, students –management conflicts have often been handled in much more specific and contingent ways. For example, Ajibade (2013) in his search of the literature revealed that many scholars have written on the management of students-management conflicts and that efforts at managing such conflicts by the concerned authorities often take the form of immediate closure of institutions with an ultimatum instructing students to vacate their halls of residence and premises; suspension or dissolution of students' unions and their executives, rustication or outright expulsion of student leaders and the use of security forces like the police/army to maintain law and order in the affected institutions and that when the crises have a national impact, the government often reacts by proscribing the Students' Union Organization at the national level. Albert (2011) in Ada (2013:81) seemed to think along this line when he defined conflict management as the "coordinated and timely application of political, economic, "military and or security measures" taken in response to a situation threatening peace, with the aim of defusing the tensed situation, preventing escalation or achieving a peaceful settlement of a dispute"— italics supplied for emphasis. These measures are often taken to reduce the vibrancy of the student unions and hence their ability to undertake any further impactful actions against management and also to deter other students from joining in such actions, seeing the punishments meted out to others. In situations like these, diplomacy ceases to work as power-play takes over the conflict grounds.

2.2 Effectiveness of Conflicts Management Strategies

Effective conflict management is desired by all organizations when they are hit by conflicts. This is required not only to put the conflict to rest but also because of its importance to organizational learning. Tjosvold (1993) explained that effective conflict management is required to assist organizations get abreast with new developments and generate solutions appropriate for new threats and opportunities. For their part, Cloke & Goldsmith (2000) indicated that when conflicts are well handled, they bring about growth, increased awareness, and self-improvement. Accordingly, Kreitner & Kinicki (2004) asserted that conflict, when managed well could lead to equitable and fair agreements and that, such agreements would help disputants to build bridges of goodwill and trust amongst them as they go into the future. Kreitner & Kinicki (2004) also believed that effective conflict management induces learning as it enhances greater self-awareness and creative problem-solving. Omemu & Oladunjoye (2013) in their literature search on organizational theory and organizational behaviour suggested some criteria used in the measurement of the effectiveness of a conflict management strategy. For them, to say a strategy for conflict management is effective, it should satisfy certain criteria including organizational learning and effectiveness, the satisfaction of the needs of stakeholders and the ethics factor.

Omemu & Oladunjoye (2013), Luthans et al. (1995) and Tompkins (1995) observed that an effective conflict management strategy should be designed to enhance organizational learning. Thus, for Omemu & Oladunjoye (2013), an effective conflict management strategy is expected to lead to improved critical and innovative thinking and to teach the process of diagnosis and intervention in the right problems. In this regard, Ross' (1993) concern is about how durable a solution produced by a conflict management strategy can be. Conflict management strategies that produce both durable and mutually acceptable solutions for disputing parties and as well induce learning are effective and preferable.

Another criterion for assessing the effectiveness of conflict management strategies is whether it satisfies the needs of stakeholders, particularly, the parties involved in the conflict. Omemu & Oladunjoye (2013) indicated that effective conflict management strategies should have the ability to satisfy the needs and expectations of the strategic constituencies (stakeholders) and also ensure a balance among them. It is worth integrating the right stakeholders in the search for solutions to problems as their involvement itself could be a source of satisfaction. Re-enforcing their stance on organizational learning, Omemu & Oladunjoye (2013) argued, and this is true, that involving the right stakeholders in a problem-solving process will not only likely satisfy them but also, lead to collective learning and organizational effectiveness.

Ethics are very important in management practice in general and particularly useful for conflict management. Managers are expected to be ethical, ready to accept realities, demonstrate honesty and be ready to change when the need be. The ethical positions of managers will often influence the strategies they apply in managing conflicts, which eventually affects the success of outcomes. Mitroff (2001) argued that if we are unable to make sense of a problem and take action for the well-being of humanity, then we might have already failed to make sense of such problem or we are currently even unable to make sense of it. By implication, a problem solved unethically, has the potential of resurfacing since it will often not satisfy all parties involved.

Omemu & Oladunjoye (2013) noted therefore that, an effective leader behaves ethically—is open to new information and willing to change his or her mind. When leaders and subordinates as well as other stakeholders demonstrate commitment to managing conflicts ethically in organizations, there will be stakeholder satisfaction and collective learning and hence organizational effectiveness. Conflict when managed ethically and constructively will lead to changed relationships which Ross (1993) refers to as the extent to which positive interactions are produced between the disputants due to a given intervention than before.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Locality

The study was done at the University for Development Studies (UDS), headquartered in Tamale, Ghana. Established in 1992, the University was chosen for this study because of its uniqueness. The University was a Multi-Campus based one and had Campuses in three Regions: the Northern Region, Upper East Region, and the Upper West Region (UDS, 2016). The University was the sole University in the country operating a Trimester Calendar. The third trimester of the University was dedicated to field practical community studies. Additionally, UDS was the first public University in the country birthed autonomous without affiliation to another University for mentorship. Despite its distinctiveness, the University witnessed a number of students-management conflicts, particularly, from 1999 to 2009.

3.2 Research Design

Qualitative research design was embraced in this study for both data collection and analysis. Adopting the qualitative research design assisted the researcher in putting the research problem in appropriate context. Creswell (2014), argued that qualitative research design is an approach for investigating to comprehend the meaning given to a social or human problem by individuals or groups.

3.3 Selection of Research Participants

Forty respondents selected from the University community participated in this study. Participants in the study were required to give their views on the study problem. As a result of this, respondents from varying backgrounds who were available and willing to participate in the study were purposely drawn. However, the snowballing sampling technique was used to locate the student leaders for the study. Table 1 details the respondents used for the study

Table 1 Respondents for the study

Type of respondent	Description of respondent	Number of respondents
Past Student Leaders	Who were in office during the conflicts	12
Senior Hall Tutors	One from each campus where the conflicts occurred	4
Deans of Students	As were in the University during the conflicts	2
Vice Deans of Students	As were on the campuses of the conflicts during the period considered for the study	1
Deans-In- Charge of Campuses,	As were on the campuses of the conflicts during the period considered for the study	6
Faculty Officers of the Faculties-In-Charge	As were on the campuses of the conflicts during the period considered for the study	4
Registrars	As living Registrars who were in the University during the conflicts	2
Pro Vice Chancellors	As were in the University during the conflicts	3
Director of Works and Physical Development	As was in the University during the conflicts	1
University Librarian.	As was in the University during the conflicts	1
Campus Head of Security	As were on the campuses of the conflicts during the period considered for the study	3
A Retired Senior Police Officer	Knowledgeable in students oriented conflicts	1
Grant total		40

Source: Author's construct, 2017/Used for and adopted from Akparep et al. (2019:22)

3.4 Techniques of Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data sources were relied on for the study. Interviews were used to collect primary data with the help of an audio recording device. The interviews were supplemented with the administration of survey questionnaires, referred to by Marshall & Rossman (1995:86) as “supplemental data collection techniques” for qualitative research. Forty face-to-face/telephone interviewing sessions were held for the forty respondents who participated in the study at different times. The interviewing sessions lasted between January and March, 2017. An average of 45 minutes was used for each interview session. For each interview session scheduled, reminders were given ahead of time to engage participants. Reminders were meant to prepare participants for the interviews. Questionnaires were hand-delivered, emailed or posted to respondents as were convenient to them for administration. Ethical issues were given serious attention. All participants in the study gave their consent before being engaged. For the same ethical reasons, all names used in the analysis of data were created.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis in the study was done qualitatively. Interview audio recordings were typed and edited where appropriate. Data on field notes were also transcribed. Data were categorized into themes and organized coherently. Presentation of findings was done in narratives and direct quotes where there was the need for emphasis. Charts and graphs were also used in presenting findings where it was apt to do so.

4. Findings and Discussions

The paper aimed at investigating the strategies applied in handling students-management conflicts the University for Development Studies was plunged into between 1999 and 2009, ascertain how effective such strategies were, and proffer mechanisms for controlling conflicts in the University. The findings were presented and discussed as follows.

4.1 Handling Students-Management Conflicts in the University for Development Studies from 1999 to 2009

4.1.1 UDS' Efforts at Handling Students-Management Conflicts

The study found that the University Management showed an indifferent attitude to students' concerns and early conflict warning signs. On a scale of: very proactive, proactive, indifferent, less proactive and not proactive at all, respondents were asked to rate how proactive management was to students' concerns and early conflict warning signs. In response, 82.5% of all respondents to the study believed management showed an indifferent attitude to students' concerns and early conflict warning signs. An additional 12.5% even believed that management was less proactive in such situations. Only 5% of the respondents felt management was proactive to students' concerns and early conflict warning signs. What this finding suggested was that student-management conflicts that could be prevented early, easily escalated to levels of great concern. For example, a hall tutor said: “the lack of proactive initiatives to quell potential conflicts is often an issue. The tendency for students and management to act on hearsay without verification is a strong source of conflicts” (Interviews, 2017).

4.2 Strategies used by UDS in Handling Conflicts between Students and Management from 1999 to 2009

As observed by Blake & Monton (1964) and Liket (1961) and emphasized by Ajibade (2013) in their analysis of strategies often used in handling students-management conflicts, the study revealed that even though a number of strategies were used by the University in handling conflicts between students and management, they largely relied on forcing/domination. This was what Robbins (1974) aptly referred to as authoritative command. All student respondents believed management authoritatively forced its will on the students in conflict situations and commanded obedience to orders. This was also the view of up to 67.9% of management respondents. A student respondent corroborating the above, said “when we had the disagreements in the 2008/2009 conflict, management refused to listen to us and wrote to me, suspending me from my position as SRC president. Management tried forcing their will on us students but failed. Management is noted for bullying” (Interviews, 2017).

Forcing/domination was found to have been applied in varying degrees in the handling of all the conflicts that occurred in the University between students and management, particularly, in the 1999/2000, 2004/2005 and 2008/2009 cases in Nyankpala, Navrongo and Wa respectively.

Also cited as frequently used strategies in the handling of students-management conflicts were: ignoring in which management often ignored the issues of conflict through passive withdrawal from the problem or active suppression of the issues as happened in the 2001/2002 Navrongo and the 2005/2006 Wa cases, the suspension and/or dissolution of students' unions and their executives and rustication or threat of rustication of student leaders (as happened in the 1999/2000 Nyankpala and the 2008/2009 Wa cases). More than 50% of each category of the study respondents believed these strategies were used. Respondents attributed the use of the strategies by management to the fact that management mostly took issues of students lightly until they escalated and also, the fact that management saw themselves as being more powerful than students and so often ignored attempts to engage students in finding solutions to their problems. This view of the respondents was in harmony with that of Kreitner & Kinicki (2004) who noted that ignoring as an approach to conflict management was suitable when dealing with issues that were negligible and worth more ignoring than confronting or attempting to resolve. It also consolidated what Best (2006) called 'conflict suppression' where more powerful parties in conflict or stronger interveners in the conflict had the capability to manage the conflict for solutions but chose to use their power or force to push the issue aside and or impose an unsustainable and unsatisfactory solution to the conflicting parties.

Another strategy that was identified by respondents of this study to have been used by management in handling the conflicts was integration, as in taking time to cooperatively identify and correct the sources of their conflicts by identifying and weighing alternative solutions and selecting a solution that was best as in line with the view of Hellriegel & Slocum (2011). But this received only 5% and 17.9% of choices from student and management respondents respectively as being applied.

Other strategies used but less frequently were: compromises undertaken through skillful negotiation of outcomes between the two for mutual benefit. On this, Kreitner & Kinicki (2004) asserted that compromising is a give-and-take approach to dealing with conflict. There was also a brief closure of the University during the 2008/2009 conflict on Wa Campus. The study found that integration and compromising were eventually used in the 2008/2009 Wa conflict when forcing/domination failed. The use of security forces, particularly, the police, to maintain law and order was also mentioned as another strategy used in the handling of student-management conflicts in the University as was used in the 2008/2009 Wa case, though minimally. The use of police and other forces was, however, criticized by Anifowoshe (2004) and Ajibade (2013) as it often led to violence and more often than not, at the sight of the police, protesting students ignite campus disturbances rather than reducing the likelihood of violence.

4.2.1 Third-Party Intervention in Handling Conflicts between Students and Management in UDS from 1999 to 2009

The study revealed that the handling of conflicts between students and management in the University was often a one-sided affair with minimal two-party and third-party engagements. The 2005/2006 situation was a two-party affair. There was a third-party engagement in the 2008/2009 conflict. The rest of the conflicts were one-sided; handled with management forcing herself on the conflicts and demanding compliance from students. In the 2008/2009 students-management conflict on the Wa Campus, it took a third-party intervention to deal with the situation. Thus, according to Ruzich (1999:129) a conflict triangle (third-party intervention) "occurs when two people are having a problem and, instead of addressing the problem directly with each other, one of them gets a third person involved". This becomes necessary when the two are unable to deal with the issue. This study established that a government delegation, represented by the Ministry of Education and the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) intervened in the case of the 2008/2009 conflict. The study further established that prior to the government delegation, other stakeholders, including the Upper West Regional Coordinating Council, the Wa Municipal Assembly, Member of Parliament of the Wa Central Constituency and the Traditional Authority of Wa had intervened but failed to deal with the conflict that ended up in the Law Court.

The research findings revealed that the stakeholders, particularly, the government delegation intervened because management failed to handle the conflict with the students and that the conflict had become protracted with the students proving to be more powerful to deal with even as they gained more support and sympathy from the general public through media hype. One account maintained that the head of management at the time was repressive and autocratic and also operated outside the Laws and Statutes of the University; disregarding internal process. This, as alluded to by respondents, made it necessary for external intervention.

It was indicated during the interviews that some important management members from the office of the Dean of Students and Pro-Vice Chancellor were left out of the conflict management processes until it got worse. A student respondent remarked that:

A problem that could have been easily resolved degenerated because management failed to handle it as it was supposed to. Eventually, it was left in the hands of a management member who was not involved in the conflict situation earlier, especially when it was required and this could have been done easily (Interviews, 2017).

From the study, it was revealed that third-party intervention in the conflict took the form of mediation. It was discovered that third parties in the conflict tried to be objective and neutral in their approach to handling the conflict. This intervention reduced antagonism between the disputants and produced somewhat satisfactory results.

4.3 Effectiveness of the Strategies Used in Handling the Students-Management Conflicts in UDS from 1999 to 2009

The main focus of this paper was to examine the effectiveness of the strategies used in handling the students-management conflicts during the period under review. In all conflict situations, the application of given strategies to the management process differs in their effectiveness. Hence, the attempt by the research to investigate the effectiveness of the strategies that were used.

Of the strategies used by the University in handling students-management conflict, respondents rated their effectiveness on the scale of: highly effective, effective, moderately effective, less effective and not effective. The rating was guided by the views of Omemu & Oladunjoye (2013) and Ross (1993) on such parameters as: how acceptable and satisfactory they were to stakeholders, how they ensured lasting solutions to the conflicts and induced organizational learning, how ethical they were and how they transformed relationships in a positive direction in the conflict situations as a measure of their effectiveness. This study showed that the most frequently used strategy was forcing/domination (authoritative command) which according to respondents of the study, was not effective in managing the conflicts. A hundred percent of student respondents and 89.3% of management respondents shared this view. Respondents believed the use of this strategy even worsened the conflicts instead.

Other frequently used strategies but, also rated by respondents as ineffective in the handling of students-management conflicts were: ignoring, in which management often ignored the issues of conflict through passive withdrawal from the problem or active suppression of the issues, the suspension and/or dissolution of students' unions and their executives and rustication or threat of rustication or outright expulsion of student leaders. The majority of the respondents (above 50% in each category) supported the view that these strategies used in managing the conflicts were not effective. "I was surprised that when I persuaded the Dean to go with me to talk to students on issues of concern to calm them down, he ignored it and dammed the consequences which he lived to see and regret any way" (Interviews, 2017). A student respondent intimated.

Integration, also called problem-solving which took time to cooperatively identify and correct the sources of conflicts by identifying and weighing alternative solutions and selecting the best was seen by respondents (100% of student respondents and 67.9% of management respondents) as being the most effective strategy ever used by the University but very rarely so. One strategy used which respondents (91.7% of student respondents and 82.1% of management respondents) felt was moderately effective was compromises encouraged and undertaken through skillful negotiation of outcomes between the two for mutual benefit. Yet, it was also rarely used. A respondent argued:

For me, the best way to ever deal with students-management conflicts is to see both students and management as having a relevant and equal stake in the University and getting both together to find out what their concerns are and how to dialogue for mutual benefit. This hardly happens. And this is where I have a problem since in most cases it is about the exertion of power and authority by management over students and the reaction to this is that students rebel, forcing themselves to get heard and the problem escalates, as has been the case of most conflicts in the University (Interviews, 2017).

The closure of the University and the use of security forces, particularly, the police to maintain law and order were also identified by respondents as less effective strategies used in the handling of student-management conflicts in the University. Over 50% of each category of the respondents shared this view.

Thus, none of the strategies identified to have been frequently used by the University in the handling of the conflicts was believed to have been very effective.

Only one strategy was identified to be effective yet rarely used. Also, only one strategy was identified as being moderately effective but rarely applied too. The rest were identified to be either less effective or not effective, and yet they were those used. Worse off was the commonly used domination strategy which was noted as ineffective in the handling of the conflicts.

Up to 100% of student and 78.6% of management respondents agreed that the strategies used in managing the conflicts at the time were largely regulatory and repressive and focused mainly on forcing and other assertive mechanisms with much emphasis on the use of power and authority. This, the respondents believed often worsened the conflicts than solve them. About 21.4% of management respondents, however, disagreed.

Respondents made their overall assessment of the strategies that were used by the University in handling students-management conflicts as being less effective as in Figure 1.

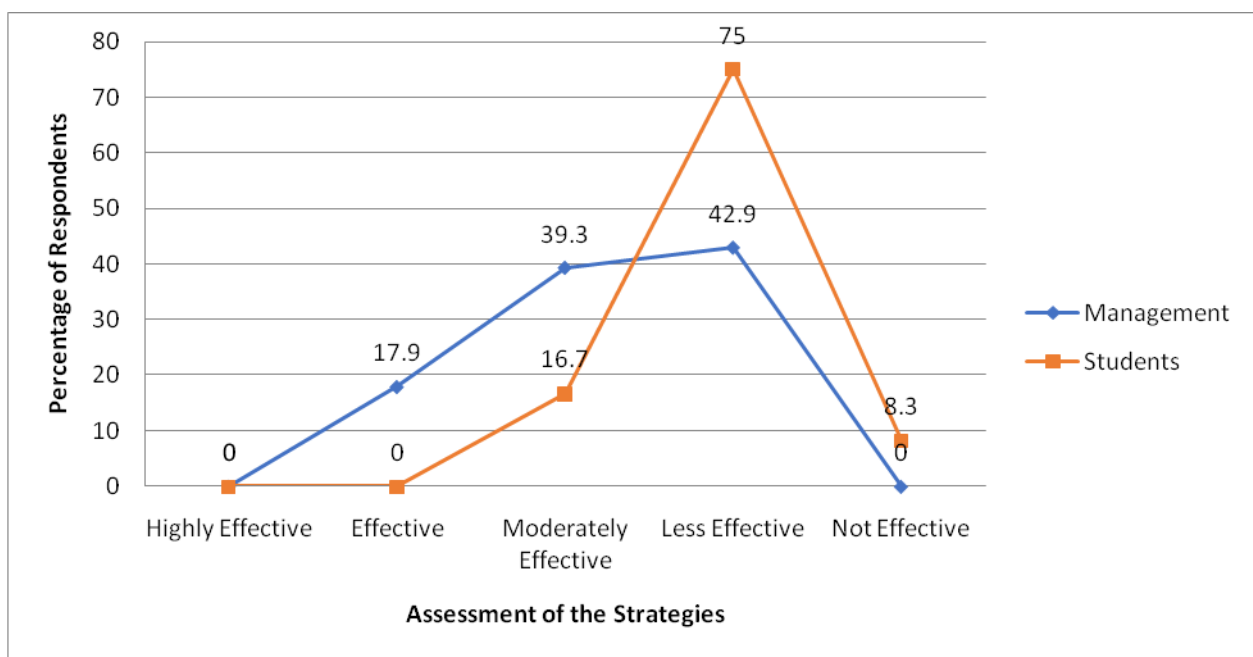


Figure 1: Respondents’ Overall Assessment of the Strategies that were used by the University in Handling Students-Management Conflicts
 Source: Field Survey, 2017

From Figure 1, both categories of the respondents agreed that the strategies that were used by the University in handling students-management conflicts were less effective. This was the view of 75% and 42.9% of student and management respondents respectively. About 39.3% of management respondents, however, believed the strategies used were moderately effective. Another 17.9% of them even believed the strategies were effective. From the student respondents’ view, no one believed the strategies were effective. Even 8.3% believed the strategies were not effective. Both categories of respondents, on another note, also agreed that the strategies were not highly effective. In effect, respondents agreed that the strategies used in handling the conflicts were less effective. The findings of the study confirmed Ajibade’s (2013) assertion that the measures that are usually employed by the authorities of tertiary educational institutions in managing students-management conflicts are ineffective and that such measures are often regulatory and repressive in nature; to the extent that rather than helping to address the problems, those strategies further worsen the situation.

Following up on respondents’ overall assessment of the strategies that were used by the University in handling students-management conflicts, the study sought respondents’ views on how the University effectively managed the conflicts using such strategies. The results were as in Figure 2.

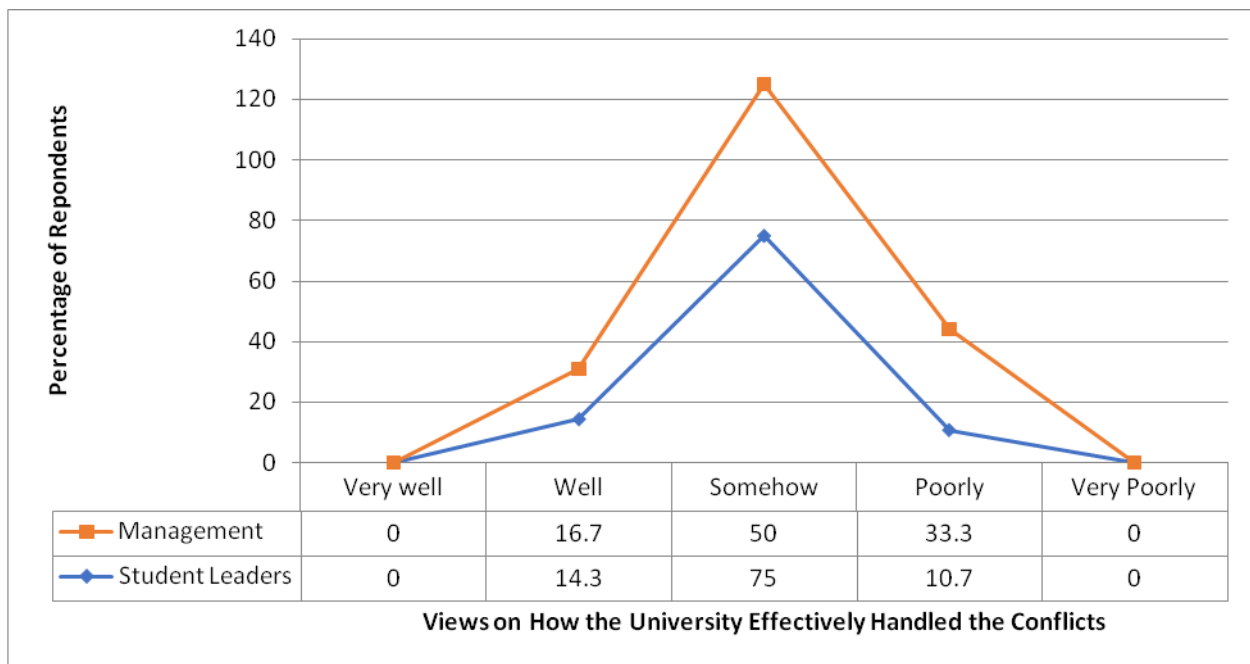


Figure 2: Respondents’ Views on How the University Effectively Handled Conflicts between Students and Management from 1999 to 2009

Source: Field Survey, 2017

The results of Figure 2 cemented the findings of Figure 1. A majority of the respondents believed that with the less effective strategies used, the University succeeded in only managing the conflicts somehow and not as effectively as desired. This view was supported by 50% of student respondents and 75% of management respondents. Only 16.7% and 14.3% of student and management respondents respectively, believed the conflicts were well handled. However, 33.3% of student respondents and 10.7% of management respondents held the view that the conflicts were poorly handled. A respondent commented:

The conflicts were not at all nice for the University and its reputation, especially when people from other universities had to be brought from outside to form a committee to solve problems that they did not create and that portrayed management as incompetent in dealing with the conflicts internally. With this, I cannot say the University effectively managed the conflicts. The University failed and the strategies used were ineffective (Interviews, 2017).

On changes to leadership, organizational culture, and design of the University, a majority of the respondents; 58.3% of student respondents and 75% of management respondents had the view that the handling of the conflicts only produced moderately positive changes, such as the fact that management began to open up somehow to listen to students’ views. This level of change was therefore less of a reflection of the effectiveness of conflict management in the University organization which should have been appreciable if not significant as argued by (Omemu & Oladunjoye, 2013)

When asked as to which extent police and other forces should be approved in dealing with students-management conflicts, the results from both student and management respondents were largely that; to a very small extent. Respondents believed that the use of such forces only compounded the conflict situation. They were of the view that such forces should only be used if calm could not be restored and if the conflicts were becoming rowdy and needed to be contained to protect life and property. Respondents further argued that students and management could cooperatively and collaboratively deal with conflicts proactively and internally without the interference of these forces. On this score, Anifowoshe (2004) and Ajibade (2013) criticized the use of police and other forces in dealing with students-management conflicts as they often led to violence rather than solving the problems.

4.4 Mechanisms of Controlling Students-Management Conflicts in the University

The study explored the views of respondents as regards how students-management conflicts in the University could be controlled. The following strategies were suggested: enhancing communication at all levels of the University, especially between students and management, involving students in decision making, improving

students-management dialogues and setting and ensuring effective functioning welfare and counseling committees/units.

Other strategies identified were: the provision of adequate infrastructure, the provision of effective institutional leadership, intensified teaching of courses on peace, conflict management and resolution in all programmes, and stamping out occultism in schools.

Enhancing communication at all levels of the University, especially between students and management was ranked by respondents as the number one strategy to adopt in controlling students-management conflicts in the University environment. Respondents believed that it could help in expressing issues of disagreement between students and Management for clarification and proactive redress that could help avoid conflicts from occurring. This buttressed the assertion of Jude-Iwuoha et al. (2014) that when information resources are provided in the right format and promptly disseminated at all times to the various academic communities and stakeholders for the purpose of educating, empowering, and taking decisions, conflict management would be made easier.

Providing adequate infrastructure for academic work in the University was identified as key to controlling students-management conflict as the inadequacy of it was cited as one of the major causes of the conflicts that occurred between students and management of the University. Respondents recommended that enrollment in the University be reduced to match with the existing infrastructure, even though some respondents bemoaned that this would deprive some students from getting a university education. Thus, Ekundayo & Ajayi (2009) believed that the provision of facilities to aid effective teaching and learning and the seriousness placed on the maintenance culture of existing infrastructure should be encouraged.

Involvement of students in decision-making, particularly on matters that affected their welfare, was another way to control students-management conflicts. Respondents noted that by involving students in decision-making, their commitment could be gotten on decisions taken. This, they believed reduced students' opposition to such decisions, enhanced cooperation in the implementation of the decisions, and hence, reduced conflicts. In line with this, Ajibade (2013) and Ada (2013) intimated that involving students in decisions on issues that concern their welfare is another democratic way of controlling students-management conflicts.

Also, improving students-management dialogues was identified as another strategy to control student-management conflicts as Ada (2013) also argued. For the respondents to this study, so long as communication between students and management was good and students were involved in decision making, it was easier to identify students' concerns early and to dialogue with them for settlement before they got out of hand and led to conflicts.

Again, as in consonance with the views of Ajibade (2013), respondents to the study believed that setting and ensuring effective functioning welfare and counseling committees/units could help control students-management conflicts in the University. Respondents believed that with these in place, students could seek assistance to deal with the realities of life. These units could also provide counselling to students to encourage positive behaviour in their relations with management which would all contribute to peaceful co-existence between the two.

Intensified teaching of courses on peace, conflict management, and resolution in all academic programmes was also cited as a possible way of controlling the conflicts. This was believed to inculcate in students how to handle disagreements to avert conflicts and also, how to handle conflicts when they arose. This was also the view of (Magagula, 2007; Fatile & Adejuwon, 2011; Chibuokwu & Nwosu, 2015).

Although the majority of the respondents to the study believed it was not really possible to stamp out occultism in schools, they believed that controlling it could help control conflicts between students and management in the University. It was therefore, suggested that efforts be made towards controlling occultism in the University as it possibly contributed to the conflicts that occurred. This was in harmony with Ekundayo & Ajayi's (2009) argument, who, in recommending ways of controlling students-management conflicts, mentioned among other things, the need to stamp out cultism in universities.

The provision of effective institutional leadership was identified to be the denominator among the other strategies for the control of the conflicts. As Adeyemi et al. (2010) said, managing conflicts in schools requires the appropriate leadership style of the school administrators. It was established that it required effective institutional leadership to ensure that the other conflict control strategies were implemented appropriately to ensure peace between students and Management of the University.

5. Conclusions

The University in handling conflicts between students and management relied mainly on forcing/domination. The University also used ignoring, the suspension and/or dissolution of students' unions and their executives, and rustication, or threat of rustication of student leaders on a frequent basis in trying to manage the conflicts. It was further discovered that integration and negotiated compromises, the closure of the University and the use of security forces (police) to maintain law and order were also used but rarely so. Of the strategies used by the University in managing the conflicts, none was very effective. Only one were said to be effective but seldomly used. One strategy was found to be moderately effective but also scarcely used. The strategies used were more regulatory and repressive. The study concluded that the strategies used by the University in handling students-management conflicts were less effective.

6. Recommendations

The study recommended that students should be fairly represented in conflict analysis and management to ensure that outcomes are satisfactory to all. The University in handling students-management conflicts should rely more on cooperative (effective) strategies such as integration and negotiated compromises and very less if at all, on regulatory and repressive (ineffective) strategies such as: forcing/domination, ignoring, the suspension, and/or dissolution of students' unions and their executives and rustication or threat of rustication of student leaders, closure of the University and the use of security forces.

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