ASSESSMENT OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISM IN NIGERIA EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract

Throughout history, there has been no lack of peace plans and peace declarations of one sort or another. Unfortunately, there appear to have been just as many conflicts to nullify them. As far as peace treaties and proclamations are concerned, most people have learned not to put too much stock in them. Within the last few years, however, many observers and news analysts have begun to feel that something different is taking place. They have raised the possibility that, despite local problems, this time the stage may be set for world peace. This paper examined the practicality of the various conflict resolution mechanism in Nigeria education system and suggested ways of improving these.

The importance of tertiary education to national development cannot be overemphasized. No meaningful development can be achieved in a conflict ridden system as experienced in the educational institutions in the country today. Experiences has shown that educational conflict is as old as the tertiary institutions in Nigeria itself. According to Agbonna, J. A; Yusuf, A; and Onifade, A.P. (2009), conflict has always and will always occur, but a well managed conflict will not degenerate to violence. This is true since violence will not erupt without conflict. Many of the conflicts in tertiary institutions and insecurity degenerated because their causes were not properly managed or that the conflicting parties did not explore the power of dialogue and conflict manager’s personality in resolving the conflict.

Efficient and effective management of conflicts is fundamental to the development of any society, but the prevailing circumstance in our tertiary institutions reveal a reversal of the present reality. Conflicts in higher institutions is inescapable. Conflict exists at every level of our academic world - primary, secondary and tertiary institutions of learning. Conflict could be between students and management; staff and management; students and students, staff and government and school and the committee. This paper examined the meaning of conflict, conflict resolution mechanism; why such mechanism have not yielded the desire expectation. While the last segment proposed a better strategy, more proactive problem-solving and solution-based actions for effective management of conflict in our schools.

Meaning of Conflict

There are two schools of thought to the concept of conflict. The first view conflict as activity that is totally negative and has no redeeming qualities. A higher percentage of scholars are of this view. To this school of thought conflict do not imply peace rather it is anti-peace. As a matter of fact it stand for or symbolize problem in human society (Fatiate, J. O. and Adejuwon K. O. 2011). The world Book Encyclopedia (2004) sees conflict as “to be in opposition to another or each other; disagree”.

Alabi, A. O. (2010) citing Kesterner and Ray, see conflict as a social feudal situation in which at least two parties (individuals, groups, states) are involved and strive for goals which can only be reached by one party and or want to employ incompatible means to achieve a certain goal. It thus implies unhealthy struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aim of the parties involved are not only to achieve their primary goals but do so by neutralizing, injuring or at most eliminating the rivals. Conflict in this content is a disturbance to peaceful co-
existence in human society and it cause a dent to harmonious relationship within and without a group. Harks (2000), threw more light on this word as he give synonymous of conflict as “quarrel, squabble, disagreement, difference of opinion, desertion, discord, friction. Thus conflict refers to a disagreement or difference in opinions as to how certain objectives could be achieved. Fatile, J. O. (2011), citing Adejuwon and Okowale, sees conflict as resulting from human interaction in the context of incompatible ends, where one’s ability to satisfy needs or ends depends on the choices, decisions and behaviour of others. It is therefore, possible to argue that conflict is endemic in human relationships and societies. Conflicts is found at every stage of life. Individuals, groups, associations, clubs, societies, local, national and even world community continue to experience conflicts in one way or the other (Alabi, A. O. 2010). Conflict is a feature of life and it has been since the beginning of creation. Conflict between darkness and light and even between and among the first set of human pair created on earth. So conflict is a permanent feature of life which we have come to live and cope with and try to resolve from time to time. Its existent it seems cannot be terminated in life unless we want to terminate life itself.

The second school of thought accept conflict as dysfunctional, destructive and at the same time as a catalyst for change, creativity and production. To this school of thought, there is need to occasionally stimulate conflict so as to have innovations and improvements in organization or society as a whole (Fatile, J. O. and Adejuwon, K. O. 2011). In this context, conflict is a “necessary evil”, which any society that seeks to develop cannot do without. What this implies is that, it will be impossible to see a society or organization without conflict. What is often questioned is how man responds to conflict; a poorly handled conflict could degenerate to something else. It could become crisis. A crisis is said to exist when conflict persists for too long a time and degenerate to wanton destruction of lives and properties defying easy solution. A typical example is the five months ASSU and Federal Government strike just been called off, though some sleeping “god fathers” are not allowing sleeping dogs to lie.

Conflict Resolution Mechanism
Successive Nigerian governments have managed conflicts in different but coercive and unconstructive ways. Albort, I. O. (2001) in Alabi, A. O. (2010), identified five major conflicts response mechanism. They are:

a. **Avoidance/denial:** This has to do with doing nothing about the problem with the hope that with time, it would be solved. Institutions and individuals resort to this for three reasons: fear of direct intervention, deliberate impunity and by stamander syndrome. Whatever reason, it is an indication that conflict managers/actors does not value peace. A manager of conflict must first value peace before he can successfully persuade the conflict parties to work towards resolving the conflict. A school conflict manager that values peace probably would see conflict resolution as a give-and-take exercise. Though, valuing peace does not mean to compromise school objectives or compromise the exclusive right of the school authority to be the custodian of the utmost power in the administration of the school, yet, the utmost power can be judiciously applied when the holder of the power values peace and has the personality of compromising a little to be able to retain peace, knowing fully well that there is no win-all in conflict resolution. Agbonnan, J. A. (2010) in Fatile, J. A. and Adejuwon, K. O. (2011).

b. **Strategic Withdrawal:** This response mechanism looks like avoidance/denial on the surface; but it is not. It has to do with not taking any immediate action on the problem or taking a mild action but seizing the opportunity to buy quality tune and space to plan and take a more decisive action. Time and tied wait for on man. Messages of resolution and peace in school conflict management need to be timely delivered. This is necessary to give a clear stance of the conflict management team and the progress made so far in resolving the conflict. Delivery the message early can help third party peace negotiators to project where to direct their intervention, such timely communication, most especially when it is positive and reveals that the stronger of the
conflict parties will work for peace and for the interest of all, alleviate fear of victimization, it reduces tension in conflict situation.

c. **Third party decision making:** This has to do with having to refer the conflict to a higher body with decision making power for settlement. In most cases, this approach involves judicial settlement, a legal mode of pacific dispute termination. In resolving school conflict, developing constructive communication process, influential negotiations and good personality are very important. If the conflicting parties are systematic in the way they communicate their grievances, and they are ready to negotiate for peace and the negotiators mediating the resolution process are of good personality, a great deal of such conflict is sure to be managed and be guided from disrupting school efforts from attaining its goals. (Agbonna, Yusuf and Onifade, 2009). The current reality indicates that the mediator is always a baby of the strong party.

d. **Confrontation:** This has to do with the use of force; police or military or treat to reverse an objectionable situation as we recently witness in Maiduguri during the Boko Haram conflict and in Jos during the Jos crisis and in Edo state- ‘no work no pay’ sack treat by the governor. From experience, the use of military operatives to trouble-shoot crisis in tertiary institution has not yielded any positive results. Instead, the military had merely compounded and aggregated the problems. Military solution has not worked in all records of conflicts in Nigerian tertiary institution instead they had increased the number of causalities, perpetrated untold humanitarian crimes and further destroyed the places physically. The police is better trained to arrest civil strife than soldiers and therefore, the police should be left to manage disputes in Nigeria tertiary institutions as a temporary measure. Treat on the other hand has no good face, no matter the side one views it.

e. **Joint Problem Solving:** This has to do with the conflict as parties working together to find mutually satisfying solutions to the problem. It also involves a neutral third party (usually a mediator) working with the disputants to deal with the problem. This is where negotiation and mediation find relevance. This mechanism too has failed the nation because of its propaganda and cognitive discrepancy in communication. Any conflict mechanism not devoid of propaganda and cognitive discrepancy will always fail to achieve its goal. Cognitive discrepancy is a condition that occurs when each conflicting party develops totally opposite explanation for the cause and situation of the conflict. Messages of the situation of conflict when developed on propaganda and cognitive discrepancy tends to breed rumour, it distorts third party’s understanding of the conflict and may hamper its involvement in the resolution of the conflict. Literature establishes the fact that third party in the situation of conflict tend to sympathize with the victims of lies rather than with lying group.

**Conclusion**

It is instructive to note that conflict in tertiary institutions is highly dysfunctional and should be avoided at all cost. All its functionalities to us can still be achieved without getting to a conflict situation. Where conflict cannot be avoided, there is need to embrace dialogue on resolving it, for as Winston Churchill once puts it, “it is better to jaw-jaw than to war-war” (Fatule, J. O. and Adejuwon, K.O. 2011). If man can get to space, I refuse to believe that man cannot solve his problem here on earth.

Why has man not be able to jaw-jaw, but war-war? Not that the various mechanism put in place are bad in themselves, but man refuse to include his maker in the picture. For those who believe the Bible history, the Israelites always lack peace whenever they turn their back at their creator. Any time they remember to call on him they always enjoy peace. Thus, any human effort at combating conflict without God’s blessing will always yield minima blessing if at all.
Recommendations

As earlier stated, conflicts is inevitable societal phenomenon. Just as conflicts abound in human beings so it is in tertiary institutions. Management of conflicts can stem down the tide of these evils or worsen them, depending on its handling. Often the usual way of using force to stop conflict is only necessary as temporary measure. The warring parties should go beyond the use of force to bring lasting solution and peace to a society in conflict. For better resolution of conflict in Nigeria, the following should be adhered to:

A Bini proverbs says “when a man draws sword for combat, pride and or shame will prevent him from returning it for peace”. It takes a third person to assist him do just so. Again, we are created in God’s image and likeness. Since God in his infinite wisdom applied mediator to resolve the “first conflict” ever existed in the history of man, I recommend that among the existing options of conflict resolution mechanism a third party mechanism should take the first place. This party must be powerful enough to avoid being swayed by hater of justice, he must be a lover of justice, lover of peace and experienced in similar matters.

To make the task easier for the third parties, the warring parties must show commitment to resolve issues peacefully. That is the parties must be ready to shift ground when necessary. No party should see herself to be completely right in conflicts. Each of the parties must be ready to make sacrifices.

The parties concerned must give full support to the resolution reached at the round table meeting. No one can force them to embrace and implement the resolutions than they themselves. Once they are able to do this, the job of local regional and international communities in supporting the resolution becomes very easy. They become umpire to monitor the levels of implementation of the resolution by the concerned parties.

References


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