Multi-Stakeholder Approach to Conflict-Resolution: A Study of Federal Polytechnics in North Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract: Conflicts are a common occurrence in educational institutions, including Federal Polytechnics in North Eastern Nigeria. Such conflicts can negatively impact the learning environment, compromise the safety of students, academics and non-teaching staff, and undermine the overall performance of the institution. Effective conflict resolution is therefore crucial for promoting a peaceful and conducive learning environment. This study explored the relationship between multi-stakeholder approach and conflict resolution in Federal Polytechnics in North Eastern Nigeria. The study was be carried out in the selected Federal Polytechnics in the north east (Bauchi, Damaturu, Mubi and Taraba) with the Governing Councils, management and staff (academic and non-academic) as the unit of analysis. The findings of this study showed a significant relationship between multi-stakeholder approaches and conflict resolution in Federal Polytechnics in North Eastern Nigeria. The study recommends that institutions adopt a structured framework for multi-stakeholder engagement that includes clear roles and responsibilities for each party. Regular training and capacity-building programs should be implemented to equip all stakeholders with the necessary skills for effective conflict management. Additionally, creating platforms for continuous dialogue and feedback can help to identify and address emerging issues promptly. Institutions should also consider integrating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms that align with the cultural context of the polytechnics to complement modern strategies.

Key word: Conflict-Resolution, Higher Educational Institutions, Multi-Stakeholder   Approach and Polytechnics.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's Higher Educational Institutions HEIs have been plagued for many years by conflicts between academic staff and government, academic staff and management, academic staff and non-academic staff and more recently in the Polytechnics between the academic staff on the lecturer cadre and those on the instructor/technician cadre. These conflicts are a persistent problem that has the potential to disrupt the academic environment and compromise the quality of education (Madani, 2019). These conflicts can be attributed to a range of factors, including resource allocation, power imbalances, cultural differences, and perceptions of unfair treatment attributed to the provisions in the extant laws in the sub sector. The conflicts manifest in different forms, including strikes by academic and non-academic staff, and political interference in the management of HEIs amongst others (Ogunode, Ohunene & Olatunde-Aiyedun, 2022).

According to Murtala, Nelly and Ogunode, (2022) staff strikes is often the result of disagreements between academic and non-academic staff and the management/

Government Councils of the institution over issues such as pay, working conditions, and job security. These strikes can last for extended periods, leading to the disruption of academic activities, delays in graduation, and loss of trust between staff and management (Jacob, Jegede & Musa, 2021). Political interference in the management of HEIs is a significant source of conflict in Nigeria. Political interference often results in the appointment of unqualified persons as Vice-Chancellors/Rectors/Provosts and other senior management staff. Also, there were repeated cases of undue interferences by some MDAs/arms of government in the statutory activities of the Polytechnics. This practice can undermine the integrity of the institution and lead to conflicts between the management and staff over issues of leadership and other workers' rights and privileges. According to Pereno and Eriksson, (2020), the Multi-Stakeholder approach is a strategy that involves bringing together representatives from different stakeholder groups to work collaboratively towards resolving conflicts. This approach has gained widespread recognition as an effective way of addressing complex problems in various settings, including business, politics, and social issues. Conflict-resolution, on the other hand, refers to the process of finding solutions to disagreements or disputes between individuals, groups, or organizations Omene, (2021).

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the use of Multi-Stakeholder approaches for conflict resolution (Dimitrovski, Lemmetyinen, Nieminen & Pohjola, 2021). The approach recognizes that conflicts are not just between two parties but involve multiple stakeholders who have different perspectives, interests, and needs. By involving all the relevant stakeholders, the approach seeks to create a shared understanding of the problem, promote mutual respect, and foster a collaborative process towards finding a mutually acceptable solution. Multi-Stakeholder approaches have been successfully used in various contexts, including environmental management, healthcare, and international development (Jotaworn & Nitivattananon, 2023). In these contexts, the approach has been found to be effective in promoting cooperation and resolving conflicts that are difficult to solve through traditional means.

The Multi-Stakeholder approach is a widely recognized strategy for achieving effective conflict resolution in various settings (Mooselu, Nikoo, Bakhtiari, Rayani & Izady, 2021). In the context of HEIs in general and Federal Polytechnics in North Eastern in particular, conflict between stakeholders is a persistent issue that has the potential to disrupt the academic environment and compromise the quality of education. Given the importance of a harmonious work environment in promoting quality education, there is a need to find effective ways of resolving conflicts between stakeholders in Federal Polytechnics. The Multi-Stakeholder approach is one strategy that has shown promise in this regard. This approach involves bringing together representatives from different stakeholder groups, including management, academic staff, non-academic staff, and students, to work collaboratively towards resolving conflicts (Keryan, Muhar, Mitrofanenko, Khoetsyan & Radinger-Peer, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

The conflict between academic Staff and Governing Councils, academic Staff and Management, academic staff and non-academic staff and academic staff on the lecturer cadre and those on the instructor/technician cadre has been attributed to various factors, including resource allocation, power imbalances, and perceptions of unfair treatment.

Despite efforts by the various institutions to resolve these conflicts, the issues persist, leading to high levels of tension, mistrust, and low morale among staff.

This research work investigated the effectiveness of a Multi-Stakeholder approach in resolving conflicts between stakeholders in Federal Polytechnics in North Eastern Nigeria. While this approach has shown promise in other settings, there is limited research on its effectiveness in the context of HEIs in general and Federal Polytechnics in North Eastern in particular. Therefore, there is a need to examine the perceptions and experiences of government, management and staff towards this approach and to identify the factors that promote or hinder its effectiveness in resolving conflicts.

The study will address the following research question:

1. What is the relationship between multi-stakeholder approach and conflict resolution in Federal Polytechnics in North Eastern Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Social Exchange Theory

With respect to social exchange theory, Mitchell, Cropanzano and Quisenberry, (2012) posits that individuals in a relationship engage in a series of transactions that involve the exchange of resources, tangible or intangible, and the expectation of a reciprocal exchange. The Social Exchange theory can be applied to Multi-Stakeholder approaches as it recognizes the need for stakeholders to exchange resources and benefits as part of the collaborative problem-solving process. By acknowledging that different stakeholders bring different assets to the table, the Social Exchange theory emphasizes the importance of understanding each stakeholder's interests, needs, and expectations and developing strategies that promote mutual gains (Gottschalk & Solli-Sæther, 2005).

Systems Theory

The Systems theory views the problem as a system consisting of different components that interact with each other (Teece, 2018). The theory recognizes that conflicts are often caused by the dysfunction of the system, and that resolving the conflict requires a holistic and systemic approach. The Systems theory can be applied to Multi-Stakeholder approaches as it emphasizes the importance of understanding the complex relationships between stakeholders and the systems in which they operate. By identifying and addressing the underlying causes of the conflict, the Systems theory promotes a systemic approach that seeks to achieve lasting and sustainable solutions.

Overall, the Social Exchange theory and Systems theory are just two of the many theories that can be used to understand and explain the Multi-Stakeholder approach and Conflict-Resolution. By using these theories, researchers and practitioners can gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of conflicts and develop more effective strategies for resolving them.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a survey instrument that comes in different forms and contexts. It is used to organize thoughts and make theoretical qualifications. A fair structure suggests the relationships between the variables under consideration and illustrates them visually or diagrammatically (Litster, Hurst & Cardoso, 2023). Conflict resolution is the dependent variable, and the independent variable is multi stakeholder approach.
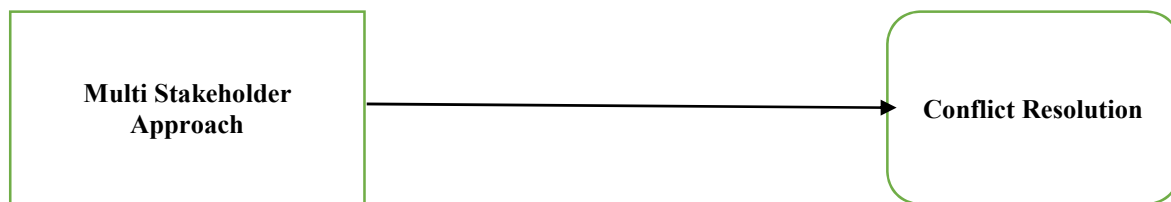
Fig.1 Conceptual framework showing the relationship between study variables
Source: Desk Research, 2023.

HO1: There is no significant relationship between multi-stakeholder approach and conflict resolution.

Concept of Multi Stakeholder Approach
In the opinion of Aksoy, Banda, Harmeling, Keiningham and Pansari, (2022) the multi-stakeholder approach is a concept that recognizes the importance of engaging a diverse set of stakeholders in decision-making processes. It acknowledges that many issues are too complex for a single entity to address effectively, and therefore, a collaborative effort involving multiple stakeholders is necessary to achieve meaningful outcomes. A stakeholder is an individual or group that has an interest in or is affected by a particular issue or decision. The multi-stakeholder approach involves bringing together a range of stakeholders, such as government officials, civil society organizations, business leaders, academics, and affected communities, to engage in dialogue, share information, and work towards a shared goal (Momen, 2020). This approach recognizes that each stakeholder has unique expertise, perspectives, and interests, and seeks to create a space for them to contribute their knowledge and experiences.

The multi-stakeholder approach has been applied in various fields, such as environmental governance, social justice, and global health (|Liu, Liu & Cheng, 2022). For example, in the context of sustainable development, multi-stakeholder initiatives bring together various stakeholders to develop and implement strategies that balance economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection. While the multi-stakeholder approach has its benefits, it also has its challenges. It requires a significant investment of time and resources to ensure that all stakeholders are included and their voices are heard. It also requires strong facilitation and communication skills to ensure that the diverse stakeholders are able to collaborate effectively. The multi-stakeholder approach offers a way to engage a range of perspectives in decision-making processes and work towards more inclusive and sustainable solutions to complex problems (Eisman, Quanbeck, Bounthavong, Panattoni & Glasgow, 2021).

Concept of Conflict
Conflict is a fundamental aspect of human existence, and it refers to a situation where two or more parties have opposing goals, interests, or values. Conflict can arise in various contexts, such as interpersonal relationships, organizations, communities, and even at the level of nations (Chen, (2019). It can manifest in different forms, ranging from minor disagreements to large-scale disputes that can escalate into violence. While conflict is often viewed as negative and something to be avoided, it can also serve as a catalyst for

change and growth. Conflict can motivate individuals and groups to reassess their positions and come up with new ideas or solutions to resolve differences (Binns, 2020). It can also foster creativity and innovation by encouraging people to think outside the box and find alternative approaches to achieve their goals.

However, unresolved conflict can also have damaging consequences, leading to emotional distress, fractured relationships, and even violence (Corner & Gill, 2020). Therefore, it is important to learn effective conflict resolution skills, such as communication, negotiation, and problem-solving, to manage conflicts in a constructive way. It is also essential to recognize and respect the diversity of perspectives and values that can contribute to conflict, and work towards finding common ground and mutual understanding. By and large, conflict is a complex and multifaceted concept that requires a nuanced understanding and careful management to minimize its negative impacts while harnessing its potential for positive change (Iftikhar, Purvis, Giannoccaro & Wang, 2022).

Concept of Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is a process of addressing disagreements or disputes in a peaceful and constructive manner, with the goal of finding a mutually acceptable solution. Conflicts can arise in a variety of settings, from interpersonal relationships to international politics. The concept of conflict resolution involves understanding the root causes of the conflict, identifying possible solutions, and working towards a resolution that benefits all parties involved (König, Kiffner, Kramer-Schadt, Fürst, Keuling & Ford, 2020). Conflict resolution can be approached in a variety of ways, depending on the nature and severity of the conflict. In some cases, parties may be able to resolve conflicts through informal communication or negotiation. In other cases, more formal processes such as mediation or arbitration may be necessary to reach a resolution.

The importance of conflict resolution is widely recognized, particularly in organizational and institutional settings. Conflict can create tension and stress, reduce productivity, and lead to negative outcomes for all parties involved. Effective conflict resolution can help to build trust, improve communication, and promote a positive and productive work environment (Andreoni & Chang, 2019). There are several key principles that underpin effective conflict resolution. These include active listening, empathy, and the ability to see issues from multiple perspectives. Other important factors include respect for diversity, clear communication, and a willingness to compromise. Conflict resolution is an essential process for addressing disputes and disagreements in a constructive and peaceful manner. By understanding the root causes of conflicts, identifying possible solutions, and working towards a resolution that benefits all parties, individuals and organizations can foster healthy relationships and promote positive outcomes (Galvin, Tywoniak & Sutherland, 2021).

Relationship between Multi-Stakeholder Approach and Conflict Resolution

The multi-stakeholder approach and conflict resolution are closely related concepts, as the former is often employed as a means to achieve the latter (Smets, Hendrickx & Ballon, 2022). Conflict resolution refers to the process of managing and resolving disputes or conflicts between individuals or groups. It involves identifying the underlying causes of the conflict, facilitating communication, and finding mutually acceptable solutions. The

multi-stakeholder approach is a useful tool in conflict resolution, as it brings together a diverse set of stakeholders who may have differing interests and perspectives on the issue at hand. By engaging these stakeholders in dialogue and decision-making processes, the multi-stakeholder approach can help to build trust, foster cooperation, and create a sense of shared ownership over the outcome Barletti, Larson, Hewlett & Delgado, 2020).

According to Nonet, Gössling, Van Tulder & Bryson, 2022), the multi-stakeholder approach can help to identify and address the root causes of the conflict. By involving a range of stakeholders, the approach can ensure that all relevant perspectives and interests are taken into account, and that any potential solutions are comprehensive and sustainable. In conflict resolution, the multi-stakeholder approach can also help to build capacity and promote learning. Through collaboration and dialogue, stakeholders can develop a deeper understanding of the issue at hand, as well as the perspectives and concerns of others (|Boom, Weijschede, Melissen, Koens & Mayer, 2021). This can help to build trust and relationships, and foster a culture of ongoing engagement and learning. The multi-stakeholder approach offers a valuable framework for conflict resolution, by bringing together diverse perspectives and interests and working towards solutions that are comprehensive, sustainable, and inclusive.

Several of these studies were either carried out in other countries or in the university sector or among students of the institution none of these studies have been conducted in the polytechnic in general and the Federal Polytechnic, in the north east in particular. This study also departed from other reviewed study as it filled the research gap. The key objective is to assess the relationship between multi-stakeholder approach and conflict-resolution: A study of Federal Polytechnics In North Eastern Nigeria

METHODOLOGY

The study was be carried out in Federal Polytechnics in the north east (Bauchi, Damaturu, Mubi and Taraba) with the Governing Councils, management and staff (academic and non-academic) as the unit of analysis. External validity represents the extent to which a study's results can be generalized or applied to other people or settings (Egami & Hartman, 2023). External validity therefore addressed the ability to generalize a study to other people and other situations. To establish the validity of the research instrument the researchers sought the opinions of experts in the field. Each of the study variables was tested for reliability using the Cronbach alpha method. As a result of the Cronbach alpha assessment, the questionnaire's reliability was established. This research required a Cronbach alpha of at least 0.7 (Cheung, Cooper-Thomas, Lau & Wang, 2023).

Primary sources will be used to gather the data in this study. The primary sources of information entail gathering new, previously undiscovered data. According to Bagheri & Sohrabi (2015), primary data refers to unprocessed information typically gathered through questionnaires, interviews, or observation. Primary data were gathered using specially created questionnaires that were administered to the Governing Councils, management, academic and non-academic staff of the selected Federal Polytechnic in the north eastern Nigeria. The choice for the instrument is for the fact that all the respondents are literate enough to fill questionnaire. The rational for selection of these Polytechnics was because

they have been in existence for longer than others, have union activities and have had instances or still have instances of conflict. Inferential statistics was used in this study's data analysis to draw conclusions and inferences. SPSS 23.0 was used to analyze the data that were collected. The study was use Spearman Rank Order Correlation to check the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The level of significance 0.05 was adopted as a criterion for the probability of accepting the null hypothesis in ($p > 0.05$) or rejecting the null hypothesis in ($p < 0.05$). The level of relationship between multi-stakeholder approaches with conflict resolution is to examine the extent to which multi-stakeholder approach can affect the outcome of conflict resolution.

Table 1   Correlations Matrix for Multi-Stakeholder Approach and Conflict Resolution.

			Conflict Resolution	Multi-Stakeholder Approaches
Spearman's rho	Conflict Resolution	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.964[**]
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	323	323
	Multi-Stakeholder Approaches	Correlation Coefficient	.964[**]	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
		N	323	323

[**]. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Source: SPSS Output

Table 1 shows a Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (rho) of 0.964 on the relationship between multi-stakeholder approach and conflict resolution. This value implies that a strong relationship exists between the variables. The direction of the relationship indicates that the correlation is positive; implying that a reduction and better resolution of conflict may be a result of the adoption of multi-stakeholder approaches. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected thus there is a strong positive correlation between multi-stakeholder approach and conflict-resolution in Federal Polytechnics in North Eastern Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The study focused on multi-stakeholder approach to conflict-resolution: a study of Federal Polytechnics in North Eastern Nigeria. Findings as presented in table 1 revealed that there is a strong positive significant relationship between multi-stakeholder approaches to conflict-resolution in Federal Polytechnics in North Eastern Nigeria. This finding agrees with the study of MacDonald, Clarke and Huang, (2022), who's finding showed that multi-

stakeholder partnerships significantly improve conflict resolution outcomes by fostering collaboration and mutual understanding. Similarly, Frolova, Rogach, Ryabova and Zuykina, (2019) demonstrated that collaboration between students, faculty, and administrative staff leads to more effective conflict resolution and a harmonious educational environment.

Further, Sattar, Ullah and Ahmad, (2022), highlight the importance of involving various stakeholders, including students, faculty, parents, and external mediators, in successful conflict resolution. Hussain, Olaywi, Amanah and Fadhil, (2024) noted that such engagement enhances transparency and trust, crucial for effective conflict management. Lastly, Paluš, Marcineková and Šálka, (2024) concluded active stakeholder participation leads to more sustainable and effective conflict solutions. Conversely, Kayser and Kaplan, (2020) identified significant barriers such as power imbalances, lack of trust, and conflicting interests that can impede effective conflict resolution. Their research revealed that despite the collaborative intentions, practical limitations often hinder the success of these approaches. Similarly, Liu, Chen, Cai, Huang and Lang, (2020) suggested that traditional mechanisms, such as mediation by elders and community leaders, sometimes prove more effective in certain cultural contexts compared to modern multi-stakeholder strategies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study highlighted the significant benefits of involving diverse stakeholders in conflict management processes. The findings indicate that when students, faculty, administrative staff, and external parties collaborate, conflicts are more effectively addressed, leading to a more harmonious and productive educational environment. This collaborative approach fosters transparency, mutual understanding, and trust, which are crucial for resolving disputes and preventing future conflicts. However, the study also underscores the importance of addressing the challenges associated with multi-stakeholder engagement, such as power imbalances and conflicting interests, to ensure the success of these initiatives.

Despite these challenges, the evidence suggests that the multi-stakeholder model is a viable and effective strategy for conflict resolution in educational institutions. By leveraging the strengths and perspectives of various stakeholders, Federal Polytechnics in North Eastern Nigeria can create a more inclusive and responsive conflict management system. The study concludes that while multi-stakeholder approaches are not without their difficulties, their potential to enhance conflict resolution outcomes makes them a valuable component of institutional conflict management strategies.

The study recommended amongst others that institutions adopt a structured framework for multi-stakeholder engagement that includes clear roles and responsibilities for each party. Regular training and capacity-building programs should be implemented to equip all stakeholders with the necessary skills for effective conflict management. Additionally, creating platforms for continuous dialogue and feedback can help to identify and address emerging issues promptly. Institutions should also consider integrating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms that align with the cultural context of the polytechnics to complement modern strategies.

Further research should be conducted to explore the specific conditions under which multi-stakeholder approaches are most effective, thereby refining and enhancing conflict resolution practices in educational settings.

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