Institutional Frameworks for Managing Intergroup Conflicts Amongst the Social Partners in Nigerian Federal University System

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Abstract

Unethical practices frequently cause disputes between social partners, and these conflicts usually results in problems for the administration of Nigeria's public universities, especially as they jeopardise academic integrity and make it difficult for institutions to carry out their operational mandates effectively. The research paper examines the effectiveness of institutional frameworks for handling intergroup conflicts among the social partners of Nigeria's Federal universities. The population of this qualitative study comprised of members of Governing Councils, principal officers of selected institutions, leaders of university-based trade unions, professional leaders in the tertiary education industry, and representatives of government agencies. Data were gathered through the use of a library to obtain a desk study analysis of available scholarly literature on institutional frameworks for preventing ethical issues that engender intergroup conflicts in the Nigerian Federal University system; the qualitative method was supported by semi-structured interviews with internal and external social partners in the university system. Findings from this study revealed that that management of disputes in academic settings affects innovation, research and academic excellence. Despite backlash from colleagues and the institution leadership, the resort to whistle-blowing is a credible complement to the legal and institutional frameworks for reducing unethical practices that might trigger intergroup conflicts in public institutions.

Keywords: Institutional frameworks, Intergroup conflicts, Social Partners, University ethics, Whistle-blowing.

Introduction

Ethical practices that trigger conflicts persist in the Nigerian Federal university system despite the attempts by National Universities Commission (NUC), the regulatory body, and the supervisory ministries such as Education, Agriculture & Rural Development and Science and Technology to curtail these threats. To combat unethical issues, the Federation's administration has implemented legislative and institutional frameworks, as well as other activities. The principal legal frameworks applicable to the university system includes the: (1) The Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal Act, 1990; (2) The Nigeria 1999 Constitution (as amended); (3) The Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act, 2000; (4) The Economic and Financial Crimes Act, 2002/2004; (5) The Public Procurement Act, 2007 and Presidential Visitation Panels (Obianyo & Emesibet, 2017; Ijewereme, 2015; TUGAR, 2012).

According to Hope (2018), institutional frameworks have principally caused establishment of anti-graft agencies. Some of them are listed as: (i) the EFCC, which is tasked with combating financial related crimes and is vested with economic and financial crime prevention, investigation, prosecution, and punishment (ii) the ICPC, which is entrusted with outlawing corrupt practises and other related offences and prescribing penalty for them; (iii) the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP), which is in charge of offering the institutional and legal framework as well as professional services, among other things. Its goal is to provide transparency, accountability, and integrity in the procurement process. (iv) For the benefit of Nigerians, the

Office of Auditor-General (OAG) performs public account audits, facilitates the submission of periodic reports to the National Assembly on wasteful spending, and assures value for money in all aspects of government financial operations; and (v) The Nigeria Police (NPF) with responsibility to protect, trace, and conduct investigations, as well as ensure due compliance of all legislation and rules (Hope, 2017).

It is worrisome to note that some of these institutions have been accused of selective investigation and prosecution owing to partisanship, ethnic bigotry or religious affiliations. For example, an institution such as the Federal Character Commission (FCC), saddled with the responsibilities of addressing problems emanating from lopsided appointments that does not reflect the true federal nature, has been alleged of accepting bribes from recalcitrant university administrators.

Review of Literature

One of the mechanisms by which dishonest activities might be exposed is the whistle-blowing process. Today, it is a crucial weapon that is utilised more and more frequently throughout the world to stop and expose wrongdoing in both the public and commercial sectors. Evidently, Nigeria lacks the necessary structures for protecting whistle-blower and does not have comprehensive whistleblowing legislation (Salihu, 2019). Recently, whistle-blowers have dominated the headlines and social networks (Berg, 2020). Whistleblowing in the context of the university system refers to drawing attention to misconduct that is taking place within the institution or among its social partners.

According to Nadler and Schulman (2015, para.5), the idea is related to ethics because "it represents a person's understanding, at a deep level, that an action his or her organisation is taking is harmful". Without mincing words, it is an issue that impedes on equality, is arbitrary, or harms the general welfare. Despite the notion that laws are designed to shield whistle-blower from reprisals, Nadler and Schulman argue that in practise, superior officers who see a threat from the discoveries may dismiss the whistle-blower, marginalise them, or even force them out of public service. On the other side, there have been instances in which acting in the capacity of a whistle blower propelled individuals into greater position and won them the confidence of their unions. An excellent example is the Governing Councils' decision to reinstate the Senior Staff Association of Nigeria Universities (SSANU) leadership that had been expelled from certain federal universities in southwest Nigeria. Affected union leaders now hold prominent positions on the union's national executive council as a result of the outcome.

Whistleblowing occurs when it is in the public's best interest, and its results either boost public trust or deter other people from reporting wrongdoing in the future (Ugowe & Adebayo, 2018). However, in evaluating senior executives' ties with their employers, their views regarding those relationships, and their bearing on wrongdoing or other improper conduct Greenwood (2021) finds that professionals in public relations are cognisant of misconduct but are not more likely to raise concerns, owing to their strong connection with respective employers. An example in point is the role of Nigerian Federal Universities (NFU) principal officers in the recent standoff between university-based unions and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) on revitalisation of public universities. The university administrators, particularly the VCs and registrars, are well aware of the deteriorating structures and teaching aid equipment in public institutions but rarely report on it, nor do they publicly support the agitating unions.

According to Bjørkelo *et al*., (2011, p.206), the majority of whistle-blowers report internally and are relatively successful in influencing change regarding the claimed violation. Yet, unions based in universities want additional details concerning the judgments and measures made by the FGN during the strike. The FGN, for instance, approved the registration of two additional academic unions, Congress of Nigerian University Academics (CONUA) and National Association of Medical and Dental Academics (NAMDA), in an effort to split Academic Staff Union of

Universities (ASUU). The implication is to lessen the influence of ASUU, which frequently reports lower job satisfaction and more workplace intimidation than its non-reporting colleagues and counterparts in National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT). As a result, disclosing unethical leadership carries some risk, which explains why not all university-based unions are eager to take action. The notion that not all union leaders take the initiative to alert the visitation panel to the misconduct and fraud of their university's top administrators is really worrisome.

Nawawi and Salin (2019) found that backlash from colleagues and the institution is the main reason preventing whistle-blowers from disclosing wrongdoing. According to the authors, there are further challenges with the procedure, including the cost of proving malpractices, financial repercussions from misconduct, and the authority's response to reports of fraud. A culturally acceptable Nigerian practise that must be taken into consideration while designing and implementing reporting of unethical activities that incite intergroup conflicts in public ivory towers is the interaction of formal and informal institutions. Okafor *et al*. (2020, p.116) recommend that "policymakers, who must also work to address the institutional and operational challenges identified, strengthen citizens' involvement in whistleblowing and partnership with anti-corruption agencies, as well as the use of an intense awareness campaign to raise acceptance of the anti-corruption initiative". The Nigerian anti-corruption organisations require a strategic approach from themselves in order to entrench productivity and guarantee functional implementation of its whistleblowing policies. This is in line with Passas' (2010) advice that the cornerstone of any new anti-corruption initiative should be whistleblowing as a strategy. Yet, Okafor *et al*. (2020) claim that authorities frequently ignore this endeavour to incorporate cultural practices into whistleblowing.

According to Salihu (2020), the Nigerian government must strengthen other anti-corruption initiatives like the policy on reporting dishonesty and the institutions that support it in order to complement the Treasury Single Account (TSA) initiative's goal of reducing other covert fraudulent practices in the public sector. Salihu, for instance, suggests a connection between the adoption of the TSA policy and a decrease in the amount of leakages, such as contract inflation and staff fraud at public organisations. This shows that in order to help the elimination of covert unethical activities in Nigeria's public universities, all pertinent anti-corruption measures should be improved. In a related scenario, Okonjo-Iweala (2018) presented not only the misapplication and misappropriation of public fund but also the measures positioned to address waste and abuse. These entail introduction of technology platforms and biometric identification system such as Integrated personnel and payroll information system (IPPIS). The payment system that was resisted by nearly all university-based unions in Nigeria for being defective in capturing the peculiarities of the university operations. It was particularly rejected by ASUU who preferred the payment option suggested as University Tertiary and Accountability Solution (UTAS).

For instance, while also justifying the decisive actions taken to assuage the spate of unethical practices in public service - manifesting in the forms of ghost workers/pensioners and judgement debt encountered in President Goodluck Jonathan's administration, Okonjo-Iweala did not hesitate to state the fact that the whole essence of her book was to provide exculpatory response to all accusations of financial mismanagement during her stewardship as Nigeria Finance Minister, considering that Finance Ministry in most countries all over the world are usually under pressure and are seldom liked, even when appreciated. It is apt to conclude that the attacks are often born out of constructive evaluation of requests from politicians and top civil servants. Albeit, the author completed seven years in office, showcasing her doggedness and tenacity in fighting corruption in spite of all attacks.

Wide-ranging reforms have recently been made to Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in Nigeria. University systems are undergoing significant change, and there is increasing demand on universities to function more effectively in order to stay relevant.

Since the leadership and economic crisis under President Muhammadu Buhari's administration have increased pressure on the public universities to achieve excellence and improve competitiveness, the effectiveness of the federal universities is now becoming more and more crucial in the nation. This is because it helps to limit conflicts among the social partners of NFU. At the basis of intergroup crisis in NFU is unethical practices. Mbara (2019, p.195) reflects that "corruption has no precise definition as it depends on the perspective of the scholar." Corrupt practises are challenging to define, but they are simple to discern if they occur. It is often easy to reach an understanding among observers regarding whether a specific behaviour suggests corruption, but in other situations it is challenging due to the act's covert character. For instance, International Monetary Fund, defines corruption as, "the intentional noncompliance with arm's length relationship aimed at deriving some advantage from this behaviour for oneself or for related individuals". Therefore, based on this narrative, good governance is the most effective strategy to stop and handle preventable intergroup conflicts that are usually sparked by dishonesty. Good governance according to Mbara (2019, p.195) "involves accountability, transparency, respect for the rule of law, participation, efficiency, effectiveness and equity in the distribution of resources".

As a result, good governance fosters trust. Sustaining industrial harmony requires trust. The issue of trust is not only important in conflict resolution, but it is also crucial to institutional cooperation, according to Adelopo and Rufai (2018). It influences political goals and group attitudes about state policy on a broad spectrum, such as the handling of organisational or workplace conflicts.

While Salihu (p.1) argues that "conventional legal and institutional frameworks are not enough to curtail corrupt activities". This is because a concealed wrongdoing which is hard to uncover unless it is revealed is capable of precipitating intergroup disagreements. Similarly, Nwoke (2019) notes that with solid legal and institutional mechanisms, whistleblowing can be a powerful tool for the establishment of a productive workplace. The bottom-line is that both researchers and many other scholars advocate whistle-blowing as a credible complement to the legal and institutional frameworks for reducing unethical practices that may trigger intergroup conflicts in public institutions, particularly as experienced in the NFU system. It is imperative therefore to ensure that the policy build in a way of exposing public servants who do not perform their duties in line with extant regulations.

Despite findings by Kaoje *et al*., (2020) that IPPIS and increased transparency in the Nigerian Civil Service's payroll administration are significantly moderately positively correlated and perceived acceptance of the payment platform by the three non-teaching unions - SSANU, Non-Academic Union of Allied and Education Institutions (NASU), and NAAT - that embrace the platform with little or no resistance, ASUU has vehemently opposed enrolling its members. The union is convinced that anyone who claims that ASUU is opposing the inclusion of NFU in the IPPIS because institutions have phantom employees on their payroll and the IPPIS would stop paying their salaries is being utterly dishonest. In order to avoid misleading the FGN, individuals pushing for the inclusion of universities in IPPIS must provide a better justification than the presence of "ghost workers" in the universities.

The notion that money or wages are basically based on work performed should be emphasised. Employers are mandated by law, customs and tradition to provide their employees with work. In return for remuneration, employees are required to complete the work in compliance with the conditions of service. In light of the general strike, which has forced NFU to closure since February 2022, university-based union leaders have been complaining and agitating over the FGN's refusal to pay their members' salaries from May to September 2022. However, some non-state actors, as noted by the print and electronic media and netizens in Nigeria, believe that the unions' outcry against the unpaid wages was unjustified.

Sections 1 to 4 of the Nigerian Labour Act established rules for the administration of workers' salaries. The FGN shall be responsible for paying compensation for work performed at the scheduled time. FGN is required to inform its employees of the specific wage amounts they are eligible to under Section 7 of the Labour Act. Strikes are confirmed as constitutionally guaranteed rights for employees under International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions 87 and 151. Nevertheless, no clause in the Conventions suggests raising payments for labour that was not done by employees. The Convention unambiguously favours attempts to organise trade unions to improve and protect employees' rights. However, a widespread myth holds that while employees are lawfully on strike, they are shielded from any unfavourable effects (Gatugel & Eze, 2015). This assumption is untrue and could be misleading.

In light of this arrangement, a worker has the right to receive his pay and emoluments for the job performed and in compliance with the worker and employer's contractual arrangements. The ideals of natural justice and fairness are predicated on the idea that a labourer deserves his wage. In addition to recognising the university-based union's right to abandon their job when bargaining with the FGN come to nothing, Section 43 of the Trade Disputes Act also grants FGN the right to withhold the employee's pay for the duration of the dispute. The National Industrial Court's verdicts also upheld the no-work, no-pay policy.

It has become essential for players in the industrial relations field to function within the parameters established by pertinent laws and international Conventions as the economy and business environment become increasingly difficult. Respecting the rules will significantly lower the likelihood of strikes or other types of legal or unlawful work disruptions (Fagbemi, 2014). Only in a disruption-free work environment can institutional prosperity and fair wages can be guaranteed. When labour is interrupted in any way, it puts the employer's capacity to pay workers' salaries in jeopardy and inevitably raises doubts about the workers' claim to compensation for undone tasks. The Trade Disputes Act (TDA) stipulates that parties to a disagreement must use all available negotiations, including the Court, whether they are optional or required. Stakeholders must embrace negotiations, yet "no work, no pay" approach ought to be eschewed. Conflicts at work must not be weaponised. Divisiveness must then disappear after the groups establish communication or accept to engage in negotiations.

FGN should compensate NAAT, NASU and SSANU for job performed since they call-off their strike, and ASUU can also end their constant industrial action, which is undermining the school system because of its excessive nature. Most disagreements in ASUU involve interests instead of rights, such as those involving usage of IPPIS payment system that, ordinarily, should have not led to the perpetual strikes (Chukwudi & Idowu, 2021). Industrial actions lose their significance for the workers when they no longer achieve desired results. All parties involved in industrial interactions must continuously enhance their capacities in light of this development. Existing regulations provide the "no work, no pay" principle, and to emphasise the point, the bulk of the "Collective Bargaining Agreements" do as well. The university-based unions urge FGN to waive this condition after strike action in the gesture or spirit of goodwill. Given that they are misleading the general citizens and claiming it to be a right, the way university-based unions is interpreting the key-phrase is inappropriate. Apparently, unions' membership fees are also intended to help workers throughout industrial action when their earnings could be stopped.

The TDA and the Section 42 (1) (a) of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution (as amended) both recognise the right of employees to strike or discontinue services as essential human rights. According to this Section, "where any worker participates in a strike, he shall not be entitled to any wages or other remuneration for the period of the strike, and any such period shall not count for the purpose of reckoning the period of continuous employment, and all rights dependent upon continuity of employment shall be adversely affected accordingly." Any of the university-based unions who plan to embark on industrial action are anticipated to advocate for the realisation of such rights because the law makes this explicit. The National Industrial Court of Nigeria (NICN), which was

granted exclusive authority by the Law on issues pertaining labour, industrial relations, and issues relating to the conditions of service, among others, has issued an advisory upon this subject.

Section 42(1)(a) of the TDA is self-executing, according to Justice Babatunde Adejumo, President of NICN, in the case of SSANU v. FGN (2008). In the absence of additional information, its enforcement is not dependent on a follow-up investigation carried out as the plaintiff requests. Industrial action is subject to the aforementioned rule whether or not it is legal, and members are not entitled to the remuneration indicated. This idea is consistent with ILO precedent, which is stated in paragraph 588 of the Geneva document Freedom of Association: Digest of Decisions and Principles of the Freedom of Association Committee of the Governing Body of the ILO that "salary deductions for days of strike give rise to no objection from the point of view of freedom of association principles." This makes it unjustified for university-based unions to demand that FGN refrain from enforcing the "no-work, no-pay" policy after a protracted strike that left many students and parents dissatisfied. The FGN's authority to withhold compensation should not be eliminated without simultaneously removing the freedom of action of university-based unions. As a result, the FGN that experienced a national strike is the only one with the authority to decide if they want to apply the "no-work, no-pay" rule.

According to the "no work, no pay" law, employees who go on strike and do not perform the legally required work are not entitled to the agreed-upon compensation. However, this is merely one side of the law's interpretation. Under some circumstances, including those involving right-related disputes or strikes brought on by the breach of collective bargaining agreements, the law recognises the right to strike. As a result, workers who are required to strike due to the violation of collective bargaining agreements would be guaranteed full wages and have a legal basis for doing so. The law forbids enslaving workplace conditions.

Ultimately, the likelihood that university staff receive compensation depends on the strength of the factors involved. Payment of pay increases to striking unions is not usually governed by constitutional subtleties, but by the tenacity and group cohesiveness of the strike force, backed by the teaming citizens, which may well affect the chances of government of the day being defeated at the elections. For this reason, the FGN had lacked capacity to effectively implement "no work, no pay" on university-based unions. This is because the unions, especially ASUU, display tenacity and enjoy broad public support, whenever industrial action ceases, an agreement with "no victimisation" provision is appended.

Conflict management methods, according to Igbinoba *et al*. (2019), are strategies used to reach a settlement in the university in order to increase service quality. According to the scholars, universities in Nigeria have suffered a significant reduction as a result of conflict. Musingafi *et al*. (2019) contend that conflict is unavoidable because humans are innately different, and conflict occurs when those differences become apparent. The authors point out that when people are equipped with an appropriate conflict resolution method, they may investigate and understand their differences and use them to communicate in a more positive, productive manner. These authors based their reasoning on the fact that resources are limited, and thus people will fight over their allocation. The authors are inspired by African methods to conflict resolution that emphasize wellness, the sanctity of humanity, cohabitation, and collaboration for progress and development. Our knowledge of conflict appears to have a significant impact on how we respond to its emergence. If we accept conflict as normal and unavoidable, the task is to manage it productively.

The concept of conflict management in peace studies has to do with the various mechanisms or measures one can adopt or employ to contain or reduce the intensity of violence and hostilities so as to avoid escalation and unwarranted collateral damages Conflict management equally becomes inevitable where conflict is protracted and immediate resolution or transformation of it

is not yet in sight. Also, looking at the fact that conflict resolution or transformation usually takes time to come by, management of such conflict automatically becomes a viable option. According to Yaqub (2001) as acknowledged in Wali (2008, p.180) "conflict management is a process that requires the services of the warring parties or a third person. The third party may be an individual, a nation or an international institution." On his own, Albert, (2001) came up with two major therapies that can serve as panacea for effective conflict management. These include "curative (reducing) vs preventive (avoiding) conflict management" (cited in Wali, p.180). The various concepts of conflict management as quoted from Berghof's book: "Handbook for Conflict Transformation" by (Mischnick, n.d., p.59) are "conflict management, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, conflict settlement, conflict transformation and peacebuilding" which are briefly discussed below:

Conflict management are actions done to reduce and neutralise open conflict. It specifically refers to measures used to manage conflicts so as to contain their negative effects, put an end to them, and avoid the vertical (i.e., escalation of violence) or horizontal (i.e., spatial expansion) escalation of already violent conflicts. Conflict prevention are activities carried out at times and places that are highly susceptible throughout the short to medium term that aim to: identify conditions which might generate violent conflict, minimise apparent tension, stop existing tensions from turning violent, and remove danger sources before violence results. It can relate to activities that take place prior to the onset of an open, violent conflict and may also involve initiatives to increase security and trust.

Conflict resolution are activities conducted in the medium and short-term to address and overcome the core reasons for conflict, encompassing structural, behavioural, or attitudinal aspects of the conflict. The procedure prioritises the participants' connections over the contents of a given solution. Conflict settlement: It is more about the participants in a dispute coming to a settlement that allows them to put a stop to a violent conflict while not automatically change the roots of said dispute. Conflict transformation is a general, all-encompassing phrase used to describe actions and procedures that aim to change the many traits and expressions of conflict by addressing the underlying term is conflict transformation. It works with the structural, behavioural, and other components of conflict with the goal of long-term transformation of dysfunctional, conflict situation into positive, constructive conflict. Conflict transformation is a concept that describes both the process and its conclusion. As a result, it goes beyond Conflict Settlement and Conflict Management and combines the actions of processes like Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution.

Peacebuilding as a post-conflict reconstruction mechanism is considered a generic term that includes all initiatives aimed at promoting and fostering a culture of peace and preventing violence. It is a protracted process that aims to induce positive mind - sets, enhance relationships between the parties involved in the dispute, and favourably alter structural inconsistencies. It may also refer to initiatives supporting humanitarian aid, social justice, peacemaking, the empowering of marginalised communities, and sustainable growth. Once the aforementioned goals are met, social inclusion will occur, which will change the current state of conflict into one of peace.

Stakeholder involvement in decision-making and resolution of conflicts has increased as a result of conflict management in Nigerian institutions of higher learning as revealed by Osakede *et al*. (2018). Conflict in higher education institution administration, according to the authors, impedes the progress of the education systems. As a result, creating a favourable climate in conflict-ridden higher education institutions is impossible. The authors, on the other hand, urge for robust, effective conflict resolution methods that enable stakeholders to engage in effective institutional governance.

Onyeizugbe *et al*. (2016) stablished a nexus between management at a university with a good attitude and avoidance of industrial action in the university system. Apparently, integrating

conflict management style is essential for maintaining copious and beneficial relations among the social partners within the university system. Unarguably, the authors affirm that the combination of high levels of emotional awareness, self-evaluation, and an accommodating style of conflict resolution facilitate better conflict management within the academic system. While agreeing with the authors, Alimba (2017) asserts that when dispute is wrongly interpreted and handled, it will impose enormous influence on the students, academic and non-teaching personnel, the system, and society at large. Williams-Ilemobola *et al.* (2021), expatiate on intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup conflicts; stating that they are predominant in university libraries. The authors concluded that emotional intelligence influenced effective management of conflicts in the organisation.

Shahani *et al.* (2018) investigated the impact of conflict handling methods such as dominating and avoiding on workers' discontent with supervisors. The study found that Employees are typically dissatisfied with the dominant and evading methods of supervision used by their superiors. While employees are happier, perform better, and are happier with their jobs, they usually adopt a compromise attitude after being affected by union participation in organizational politics. Okoli *et al.* (2017) discovered a statistically significant positive association between integrating style and staff commitment. The findings indicate that the style used in conflict resolution and the emotional intensity of those involved influence how quickly and well the disagreement is resolved. Finding enduring balance requires stakeholders to always consider the feelings of others when dealing with conflicts, opposing sides to be open and tolerant and prepared to listen out another person in order to get the best potential and sensible decision while managing conflict, and emotions to be kept in check and regulated in order to be responsive to certain problems.

Afuecheta and Ewuim (2020) discussed conflict as inevitable among those whose dealings and interactions are confined within the framework of a complex organisational setting and established that conflict resolution at academia has significant consequences for creating another much conducive condition for academic success, innovation, and creativity. The specifically established a connection between the institution's trade unions and HEIs performance. The increasing capacity of the trade unions as critical stakeholders is being questioned as to if they are partners in progress. It has been argued if communication channels are strengthened and expanded, all segments of the organisation will have covered in the communication process.

Jega (1996), focusing on the persistent crisis in Nigerian tertiary institutions, deconstructed the misconceptions and impressions fostered and maintained by the Nigerian State, particularly under military regime, that unions in Nigerian tertiary institutions are accountable for creating, instead of managing or regulating conflicts. This brings to the fore, application of securitisation. Basically, 'securitisation' or demonisation' as it is otherwise called can be likened to the local parlance of "giving dog a bad name in order to hang it." It entails the art of giving a security label to an issue or actor. It has to do with social construction of threats and security - an exaggeration of security threat.

Therefore, those who employ securitisation or demonisation as a tactic for whatever aim, do so because they want the outside audience to support their intended subjective extra-legal course as both objective and legitimate, thereby allowing them to employ extraordinary means to deal with the perceived "unpleasant situation" under the pretext of security threat. For securitisation to be done successfully, it has to go through four different processes or stages namely: Securitising actor — an entity that contrives the securitisation; the person or object to securitise; court of competent jurisdiction/legal authority to define activities of such an organisation, actor or entity as injurious or threat to the state and thus, proscribe accordingly on the basis of existing law; and an audience to be persuaded to validate the issue or actor or organisation as indeed, posing a security threat.

Once the processes of securitisation is complete, then, it is convenient to employ and/or legitimise extraordinary means to deal with the situation without any authority questioning the legality or otherwise of such means or action. Securitisation is often carried out by a country against some perceived violent groups believed to be a potential security threat to the state, or against a state within a country where there is perceived breach of the peace. For instance, during the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida and General Sani Abacha in Nigeria, principal officers (university administrators) in Nigerian public universities have been acknowledged as operating under an unwritten norm against unionisation. This has the cumulative impact of allowing intolerable working circumstances to worsen. The majority of practices and policies at federal HEIs have been unfairly used to restrict union activities. There have been occasions where the federal and state governments have used coercion, intimidation, and victimisation of university employees to maintain precarious and terrible working conditions. Psychological violence such as withholding striking universities workers' salaries, all in the name of "no work no pay" is a coercive form of securitization deployed by the government against the labour force.

Gyan and Tandoh-Offin (2014) approach conflict resolution from a different angle, addressing and analysing the core cause and source of school conflict in school administration. Conflict is exacerbated by a clash of ideals between teachers and students, misperceptions, particularly among students, and a lack of student involvement in decision making. Teachers and school administrators may increase the likelihood of conflicts in schools by using ineffective conflict resolution strategies and interacting negatively with students.

According to Akpotu *et al*. (2008, p.117), "there is no significant difference in academic staff, non-academic staff, and students' perceptions of forcing, smoothing, detraction, arbitration, and adjusting the responsible parties as appropriate treatment conflict management methods." These researchers noted that forcing, smoothing, detraction, 'arbitration', and altering the responsible parties had all been helpful in settling dispute in their colleges, despite the fact that some of them had certain drawbacks. The researchers, on the other hand, suggested that forcing be employed except as a last option.

According to Ani and Ojakorotu (2018), strikes have become a feasible tool for compelling the Nigerian government to be more devoted to university educational growth, payment of earned allowance, provision of infrastructure, and improved budgetary allocation, among other things. The authors acknowledge that ASUU strikes frequently result in worse quality of education because courses, conferences, and seminars are postponed in many public universities. According to Oredein and Durojaye (2014) conflict permeates every part of existence and conflict management is essential element in any organization, and a driver for innovation, entrepreneurship, transformation, and success. The authors identified issues such as "academic freedom, erosion of university autonomy, imbalance between demand and available resources, irrelevance of the curricula to the global needs due to advancement and growth in technology, reducing the scope of mentoring junior researchers by seasoned and senior researchers, constant strikes by both students and academic staff, brain drain syndrome, political interference, and discrimination between the tertiary institutions" as challenges that were predominant in universities which remain unnoticed. Also, these scholars argue that if disputes are not adequately managed, there are global repercussions, emphasizing the need of managing conflict using the conflict management paradigm.

Zakaria and Lazim (2018, p.24) evaluated a variety of conflict resolution techniques in diverse cultural settings and circumstances in their concept paper, which appraised the five conflict-handling modes described by Thomas and Kilmann (in 1974). According to the authors, conflict management strategies are inextricably linked to "culture, religion, and orientation," and are also strongly reliant on location and contextual circumstances. The authors found that "conflict management styles" could operate in phases, which can be investigated as "conflict management

styles" may be appropriate in diverse sorts of settings. Apparently, application of suitable conflict-handling mode is not just context dependent but also need to factor in the relevance of timeliness. To avoid ambiguity, Magaji *et al*. (2021) explain that if the dialogue, negotiation, and mediation approaches used in settling labour disputes in Nigerian institutions of higher learning fail to deal with an issue, external assistance such as conciliation, arbitration panels, and industrial courts must be permitted in settling disputes to avoid breakdowns of actions in the HEIs.

Crawford et al. (1996) published one of the first conflict resolution education papers, noting that conflict resolution education can assist reduce suspension, punitive referral, academic interruptions, playground fights, and family and sibling disputes. uncover particularly strong aspects of conflict resolution by providing young people with the necessary information and abilities to resolve disagreements peaceably. Maan (2021) discovered that dispute resolution is an essential part of human resource management in the modern era. As people's emotions become linked to professional problems, it becomes even more critical to address them efficiently. It was also discovered that good conflict management practices constitute the foundation of unbiased decision making for both parties involved in conflicts. Continuing on the path of managing people through dispute resolution. The report discusses attribution theory as being critical to every establishment.

Methodology

In order to comprehend and provide an explanation for how institutional frameworks for managing intergroup conflicts among the social partners can be strengthened in Nigerian Federal University system, we used interpretative phenomenological research design. The technique used the data obtained through in-depth interviews (IDI), key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussion (FGD) to analyse participants' shared experiences.

Discussion of Findings

The university system has structured means of encouraging ethical behaviours and discouraging unacceptable behaviours among the social partners. Be that as it may, unethical practices abound. It is not uncommon for government to disrespect whatever agreement signed with the trade unions after each negotiation (Ekwoaba *et al*., 2015). When defaulting Government renege on its collective bargaining agreement with trade unions, the unions explore various methods like strikes to draw government attention to address such unhonoured agreements (Ani & Ojakorotu, 2018). Sadly, strikes have become a feasible tool for compelling the Nigerian government to be more devoted to university educational growth, payment of earned allowance, provision of infrastructure, and improved budgetary allocation. Conflict resolution that is efficient and effective is critical to the development of any institution of higher learning (Holton, 1998). However, the current situation in NFU represents a reversal of this reality. The best approach to resolving conflict in the university is to manage conflict towards proactive and constructive action. The framework adopted by conflicting parties in the system was described by a union leader who stated thus:

> *Representatives of government should be honest in carrying out their duties and in their dealings with the trade unions. Unhonoured agreement can lead to anything except there is a mechanism to resolve issues. What resolves conflict is sincerity and openness. There are checks and balances all along the line so if there is flagrant disobedient of Trade Dispute Act, aggrieved party can approach National Industrial Court for verdict which officials in the Nigerian university system must adhere to (KII/ASUU-Official/20th March 2023).*

A principal officer interviewee affirms this position further:

> *...It is the function of law. Laws must be followed. If due process is being followed, there will be transparency. So, following the rules and regulations in the Universities brings about transparency. Secondly, I always refer to the fact that University is run by Committees. Committees managed conflicts at a smaller level. And we have different levels of conflict managers in the University. So, these committees are set up to manage or reduce intergroup conflicts. More so, conflict cannot be eradicated in society. One of the duties of the University management is to abate intergroup conflicts (IDI/Principal-Officer/20th March 2023).*

In other words, the seemingly application of provisions of the regulations including usage of committees to address issues relating to conflicts are only employed after the social partners failed to have taken appropriate action. The application of peace and reconciliation strategies by leadership of the University system is demonstrated in using some organs of the University that have the capacity to mediate on conflicts and proffer solutions. The Senate has the power to expel erring students while the Council do discipline erring members of staff. The mechanisms used by the Federal government or the university management to ensure that conflicting roles are well defined are contained in the rules and regulations governing the condition of service, career structures in the university and most government circulars from NUC. When conflict management methods are strategies deployed to reach a settlement in the university, service quality would be increased (Igbinoba *et al*., 2019).

This study discovered that management of disputes in academic settings affects innovation, research and academic excellence. When resolution of conflicts is done inappropriately, it leads to time wasting among management staff and the little funding that is available may be spend on litigations. However, if leaders are perceived fair to all in directing affairs of the system in ways that are thought just by stakeholders, then fairness had played out. But when other stakeholders were not well represented it may lead to short changing of employees' rights and privileges.

The careful usage of various institutional arrangements is meant to prevent a situation where unethical practices hold sway. Disputes between the social partners are frequently brought on by dishonesty, and these conflicts usually provide problems for the administration of Nigeria's public universities, particularly because they compromise academic culture and make it difficult for institutions to carry out their mandates. Salihu (2019), explained that one of the mechanisms by which dishonest activities might be exposed is the whistle-blowing process. Whistleblowing in the context of the university system refers to drawing attention to misconduct that is taking place within the institution or among its social partners. Nadler and Schulman (2015) the concept is related to ethics because it represents a person's deep understanding that an action his or her organisation is taking is unethical. It obstructs equality and arbitrarily harms the whistle-blower's overall well-being. However, Nigeria lacks the necessary structures for protecting whistle-blower and does not have comprehensive whistleblowing legislation designed to shield whistle-blowers from reprisals. A non-teaching staff provided details on the sanction deployed by a Council whose nefarious activities were reported by stating that:

> *We were marginalised and almost forced out of the system. As a matter of fact, our appointments were terminated by the Governing Council when we reported that the VC and some top management were drawing illegal allowances. All thanks to God that we were later reinstated. Our resolve to report illegality in the system and bold steps taken also catapulted us into greater positions at the national level because we earned the confidence of our union (IDI/SSANU-National-Official-Management-Staff/20th March 2023).*

The use of whistleblowing method remains an integral part of exposing unethical practices in the ivory towers occurs when it is in the university's best interest, and its results either boost public trust or deter other people from reporting wrongdoing in the future (Ugowe and Adebayo, 2018). The resort to whistle-blowing is a credible complement to the legal and institutional frameworks for reducing unethical practices that may trigger intergroup conflicts in public institutions, particularly as experienced in the university system. But for some of the management staff, especially the members of ASUU whose financial members are in the majority in Council and top management of the institutions, this whistleblowing method brings embarrassment and shame that may be difficult to repair to the university. Some leaders of the non-teaching unions, especially the career Directors, are cognisant of misconducts in the system but are not more likely to raise concerns, owing to their strong connection with respective employers. In the same vein, university administrators, particularly the VCs and Registrars, are well aware of the deteriorating structures and teaching aid equipment in the universities but rarely report on it, nor do they publicly support the agitating unions.

Backlash from colleagues and the institution leadership is the main reason preventing whistle-blowers from disclosing wrongdoing. Challenges with the procedure, including the cost of proving malpractices, financial repercussions from misconduct, and the authority's response to reports of unethical standards are all discouraging factor militating against this usage of this method (Nawawi and Salin, 2019). The evolution of successes and consequences of the approach also depend on the nature of reprisals. Hence, ASUU which frequently reports lower job satisfaction and more workplace intimidation than its non-reporting colleagues and counterparts in the non-teaching unions (NAAT, NASU or SSANU) frustrated the federal government into endorsement of approval of the registration of two additional academic unions, CONUA and NAMDA. The implication is to lessen the influence of ASUU that frequently go on strike as a mean of protest.

At this point, it is imperative to identify the specific forms of institutional frameworks that are still being used by the social partners to address culturally unacceptable activities that incite intergroup conflicts amongst them. Of course, the first and the most direct form is the extension of Treasury Single Account (TSA) initiative for reducing covert fraudulent practices in the system. The federal government also use technology platforms and biometric identification system such as IPPIS to checkmate payroll fraud that was rampant and apparently in existence in nearly all the federal university system. The system was effective in exposing misapplication and misappropriation of public fund but lacks adequate measures positioned to address peculiarities of the university operations. The statement of this IPPIS official affirms the use of this policy for checking institutional integrity and transparency thus:

> *Before the policy was introduced, aside the public service, several federal universities were involved in this unethical practice. If you want to be above board, some powerful people will frustrate you. For example, whenever a particular university wishes to manipulate the payroll system with intention of getting extra fund, retired employees and ghost workers are brought on the payroll. In addition, junior employees were presented as being on senior levels by the university in question. Many federal universities were operating in this way so that they could have so much to throw around (IDI/IPPIS-Official/31st January 2023).*

An ameliorative view of the framework was captured in the focus group data where discussants agreed a good reform has largely been synonymous with improvement of the governance system in terms of capacity of universities and competencies of administrators in effectively managing personnel in their respective institutions:

> *There is need for better understanding and cooperation between the University system as a whole and the government of the federation on the implementation of IPPIS. Failure to do so will only result in chaos, which will do both parties no favour. It is equally very important that the laws of the land must be respected, irrespective of how uncomfortable it may be to our reasoning. Our union did not join in the strike against implementation of the policy on IPPIS because we consider it okay if genuinely executed to address issues of payroll fraud and negotiated agreements. Besides, we are not favourably disposed to strikes except when pushed to the wall. We must be on ground to calibrate, control specimens so that millions of naira worth laboratory equipment will not be damaged (FGD/NAAT/8th March 2023).*

The statement above shows that government make use of policies to control ethical practices. Hence, intergroup conflicts can be abated on issue of welfare when government honours agreements reached with unions. Staff welfare issue can be mitigated when the government sincerely honours agreements reached with staff unions. This is made possible if the Governing Councils play their mediatory role and also devise means to motivate staff. The fact that NAAT supported IPPIS is because it favoured her members' interest in the payment of Hazard Allowance. The payment was an outcome of negotiated agreement with government. Thus, administrative reform and institutional changes could be placed high on the agenda for effective university governance. A viable reform can shape leadership renewal of mindset if it is in line with institutionalised academic culture within the framework of good governance. Omoleke (2018) explained that constellation of administration, law and politics will go a long way to determine good governance if effectively explored and utilised by leadership in public service.

Therefore, based on this point, good governance is the most effective strategy to stop and handle preventable intergroup conflicts that are usually generated by dishonesty. Good governance involves accountability, transparency, respect for the rule of law, participation, efficiency, effectiveness and equity in the distribution of resources (Adelopo & Rufai, 2020; Mbara, 2019).

Judicious application of enabling laws is to the benefit of university social partners in addressing intergroup conflict. In light of the general strike, which has forced the public universities to closure, first by ASUU from February 2022, and later joined by NAAT in March 2022 and JAC of SSANU and NASU by April 2022, university-based union leaders had complained and agitated over government refusal to pay their members' salaries throughout the strike action.

The law establishes that wages based on work performed should be emphasised. Thus, employers are mandated by law and tradition to provide their employees with work. In return for remuneration, employees are required to do their work in compliance with the conditions of service. Sections 1 to 4 of the Nigerian Labour Act established rules for the administration of workers' salaries. Government shall be responsible for paying employees for work performed at the scheduled time under Section 7 of the Labour Act. For the workers, strikes are confirmed as constitutionally guaranteed rights for employees under International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions 87 and 151. However, no clause in the Conventions suggests raising payments for labour that was not done by employees. The Convention unambiguously favours attempts to organise trade unions to improve and protect employees' rights. Whereas, a widespread myth holds that while employees are lawfully on strike, they are shielded from any unfavourable effects. This assumption is untrue and could be misleading.

In light of this arrangement, a worker has the right to receive his pay and emoluments for the job performed and in compliance with the worker and employer's contractual arrangements. The ideals of natural justice and fairness are predicated on the idea that "a labourer deserves his wage". In addition to recognising the university trade-based unions' right to abandon their job when bargaining with the FGN come to nothing, Section 43 of the Trade Disputes Act also grants

FGN the right to withhold the employee's pay for the duration of the dispute. The National Industrial Court's verdicts also upheld the no-work, no-pay policy. The government and trade unions have not functioned within the parameters established by pertinent laws and international Conventions. This was as a result of the fact that the government have always paid salaries of striking university workers, with the except for the unions' strike actions in 2022. Respecting the rules can significantly lower the likelihood of strikes or other types of legal or unlawful work disruptions. The Trade Disputes Act (TDA) stipulates that parties to a disagreement must use all available negotiations, including the Court, whether they are optional or required. The social partners can embrace negotiations in order to avoid no-work, no-pay approach.

This study however, discovered that enforcement of no-work, no-pay approach is an effective policy of government that can end trade unions constant industrial action. This is because strike undermines the school system because of its excessive nature. It should, however be noted that most disagreements with trade unions involve interests instead of rights. The system which has existing regulations provide the no-work, no-pay principle, and to emphasise the point, the bulk of the collective bargaining agreements do as well. Further, the university trade unions tend to urge the government to waive no-work, no-pay condition after strike actions in the gesture of goodwill, by misleading the general citizens and claiming it to be a right. The TDA and the Section 42 (1) (a) of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution (as amended) both recognise the right of employees to strike or discontinue services as essential human rights. In other words, this Section implies that when a worker participates in a strike, he forfeits his right to any wages or other compensation for the duration of the strike, and any such period is disregarded when calculating the length of continuous employment. This has an adverse effect on all rights that depend on continuity of employment.

Any of the university-based unions who plan to embark on industrial action are anticipated to advocate for the realisation of such rights because the law makes this explicit. The National Industrial Court of Nigeria (NICN), which was granted exclusive authority by the Law on issues pertaining labour, industrial relations, and issues relating to the conditions of service, among others, has issued an advisory upon this subject.

The no-work, no-pay policy serves dual purposes in the sense that, staff who go on strike and do not perform the legally required work are not entitled to the agreed-upon compensation. However, this is merely one side of the law's interpretation. Under some circumstances, including those involving right-related disputes or strikes brought on by the breach of collective bargaining agreements, the regulation recognises the right to strike. Thus, workers who are required to strike due to the violation of collective bargaining agreements would be guaranteed full wages and have a legal basis for doing so.

Ultimately, the likelihood that university staff receive compensation depends on the strength of the factors involved. Payment of salaries to striking unions is not usually governed by constitutional subtleties, but by the tenacity and group cohesiveness of the strike force, backed by the teaming citizens, which may well affect the chances of government of the day being defeated at the elections, as witnessed in the recent General Elections where the ruling party lost some of their stronghold states to the opposition parties. For this reason, the government had lacked capacity to effectively implement no-work, no-pay policy on university workers. This is because the unions, especially ASUU, display tenacity and enjoy broad public support, whenever industrial action ceases, an agreement with 'no victimisation' provision is appended.

Nevertheless, there are moral and social implications for the application of the legal and institutional frameworks in combating unethical practices that engender intergroup conflicts. For example, Visitation Panels reports have to come to the Governing Councils after unnecessary delays, in form of a White Paper. Some recommendations would have been watered down while some had been removed. The social embarrassment is that some of these institutions have been

accused of selective investigation and prosecution owing to partisanship, ethnic bigotry or religious affiliations. For example, an institution such as the Federal Character Commission (FCC), saddled with the responsibilities of addressing problems emanating from lopsided appointments that does not reflect the true federal nature, has been alleged of accepting bribes and gratifications from corrupt university administrators.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this paper, we have established that application of peace and reconciliation strategies by leadership of the university system is demonstrated in using some organs of the University, such as Council and Senate committees, that have the capacity to mediate on conflicts and proffer solutions. This paper affirmed that management of disputes in academic settings affects innovation, research and academic excellence. Despite backlash from colleagues and the institution leadership, the resort to whistle-blowing is a credible complement to the legal and institutional frameworks for reducing unethical practices that might trigger intergroup conflicts in public institutions, particularly as experienced in the university system. Extension of Treasury Single Account (TSA) initiative for reducing covert fraudulent practices in the system and deployment of technology platforms and biometric identification system such as IPPIS to checkmate payroll fraud that was rampant and apparently in existence in nearly all the federal university system were effective in exposing misapplication and misappropriation of public fund. The only exception to the latter is that it lacked adequate measures positioned to address peculiarities of the university operations.

In addition, the principal legal frameworks applicable to the university system like Presidential Visitation Panels who received report in form of White Paper, sometimes watered down and removed valid recommendations; while the Federal Character Commission, saddled with the responsibilities of addressing problems relating to lopsided appointments in defiance of the true federal nature had been alleged of accepting bribes and gratifications from corrupt university administrators.

Several institutional and legislative frameworks for addressing intergroup disputes among social partners have been put in place, but much work remains to be done to assess the overwhelming effect of external social partners (supervisory and regulatory agencies) on federal universities.

A general review of the legal frameworks is required to remove potential ambiguities and enable further democratisation of institutional governance. Every university should make its laws, statutes, and regulations accessible to all of its employees. The university should require administrators, department heads, directors, deans, and other stakeholders to undergo training and retraining in all laws, statutes, and regulations. It is therefore vital that both the Government and the Pro-Chancellors should facilitate appropriate conflict management system and peace-building strategies to address intergroup conflicts involving the social partners in the university system. In addition to the extant regulations, the Federal Government should initiate amendment to the laws to strengthen the internal mechanism by increasing representations of other stakeholders, to have the Registrars and the Bursars (who are appointees of the Governing Council) as full members of the Councils, not as mere observers.

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