

## Impact of Conflict Management in Universities in North central Nigeria

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### Abstract

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Conflicts have remained a persistent challenge in Nigerian universities, often undermining institutional effectiveness, staff productivity, and academic stability. This study investigated the causes of conflicts, methods of conflict management, and the impact of communication on conflict management in federal and state universities in North-Central Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised 11,293 academic and non-academic personnel, from which a sample of 446 respondents was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled *Communication and Conflict Management Questionnaire (CCMQ)*, validated by experts and yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.77. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while independent sample t-tests tested the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that communication gaps, highhandedness of management, inadequate funding, poor working conditions, and failure to honour collective bargaining agreements were major causes of conflict. Dialogue, negotiation, collaboration, conciliation, and arbitration emerged as commonly employed conflict management strategies. The study further established that effective communication significantly enhances conflict management by reducing suspicion, preventing misinterpretation, promoting dialogue, and facilitating collective bargaining. No significant differences were found between federal and state universities on the causes, methods, or impact of communication on conflict management. The study concludes that effective communication is central to sustainable conflict management in Nigerian universities and recommends the strengthening of open and transparent communication channels.

**Keywords:** *Conflict management; Communication, Nigerian universities; Organizational conflict; Higher education administration*

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## **Background to the Study**

Education is vital to the pace of social, political, cultural, technological, and economic development of any nation. The educational system in Nigeria comprises different levels, namely pre-primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions, of which the university level is inclusive (National Policy on Education, 2004). University has been defined severally. According to Adeleke (2005), a university is a place of enlightenment, a place for exploring frontiers, and an institution in which people, through the process of socialization, are imbued with the ability not just to discern things but also to apply theories to explain events, values, and the knowledge of natural order for the pursuit of common welfare and then individual well-being. The university is also a place for training high-level manpower and equipping individuals to enhance their level of performance in their present and future roles.

It has been observed that Nigerian universities have, for over four decades, been faced with scores of conflicts, ranging from those between academic staff and university administrators, students and academic staff, students and university authorities, and non-academic staff and university administrators. Professionals and academics in universities have developed mistrust and hostility due to these conflicts (Olaleye & Arogundade, 2013).

Fadipe (2000) defined conflict as a form of disagreement in an establishment between two individuals or groups who have cause to interact formally or informally. It could be described as all forms of opposition, disagreement, and friction between two or more parties, and it manifests in the forms of arguments, protests, demonstrations, aggression, and other destructive behaviours (Adeyemi & Ademilua, 2012). According to Olaleye and Arogundade (2012), nonpayment of salaries as and when due, sudden changes in university policies, imposition of decisions on employees by professional administrators, inadequate provision of physical amenities such as electricity and water, denials of rights and privileges, nonimplementation of government circulars on staff welfare, allegations of corruption against university professional administrators, refusal of management to honour agreements reached with workers' unions, miscomprehension of duties, discriminatory application of university rules and regulations, and communication gaps.

George and Jones (2007) opined that conflict, both interpersonal and between groups, has many sources, which include differentiation, task relationships, and scarcity of resources. Conflict in the universities may lead to low productivity among staff, inability to achieve the goals and objectives of the institution, closing down of universities, loss of lives and property, suspension or dismissal of staff and students found guilty, delay in promotion of staff, and disruption of the academic calendar in the universities. It may also result to impediments to smooth working, diminishing output, obstructions in the decision-making process, and formation of competing affiliations within the organization. The total implication here is that such negative effects are likely to reduce employees' commitment to organizational goals and organizational efficiency. Fadipe (2000) has observed that the management of educational institutions is no more exclusive to the management of

physical resources alone. Man's behaviour especially his grievances or conflicts, should be attended to by educational managers. This suggests effective conflict management in the universities.

According to Best (2016), conflict management is the process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity of conflict through a number of measures by working with and through the parties involved in that conflict. The term is sometimes used synonymously with conflict resolution. It covers the entire area of handling conflict positively, including those efforts made to prevent conflicts by being proactive. It encompasses conflict limitation, containment, and litigation.

Conflict can be managed through various methods. Igboaka (2018) believes that conflict could be managed through various methods, which include good governance, peace education, collaboration, negotiation, mediation, and communication. Communication here is defined as the process of sharing and exchanging information between individuals, groups, and parties in a conflict situation. It also involves interaction and relating with others, ensuring that parties to a conflict relate verbally and share information on the real causes and effects of conflict. Madu (2015) noted that communication has become a key strategy in conflict management. He asserted that most of the nonviolent methods of conflict management, such as collaboration, negotiation, and dialogue, as well as third-party interventions like mediation, conciliation, arbitration, and adjudication, are largely dependent on effective communication. Although it is asserted that effective communication impacts positively on conflict management, there is a paucity of empirical evidence on the impact of communication on conflict management, especially among universities in north-central Nigeria; hence, the need for the present study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Managers of resources world over, especially human resources, are often faced with the challenge of managing conflict that exists within the workplace. Misunderstanding and mistrust arising from poor communication are among the greatest problems institutional managers face. Problems arising as a result of ineffective communication are almost endless. Each failure can result in serious losses, errors, delays, misunderstandings and conflicts. The problem of the study is, what is the impact of communication on conflict management in universities in north-central Nigeria? This is the problem the current study stands to address.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study has the following purposes.

1. To determine the causes of conflicts in federal and state universities in North-Central Nigeria.
2. The study also aims to identify the various conflict management methods used in federal and state universities in North-Central Nigeria.
3. To determine the impact of communication on conflict management in federal and state universities in North-Central Nigeria.

## **Research Question**

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the causes of conflict in federal and state universities in North-Central Nigeria?
2. What are the various methods employed in conflict management in federal and state universities in North-Central Nigeria?
3. What is the impact of communication on conflict management in federal and state universities in North-Central Nigeria?

## **Hypotheses**

The following hypothesis guided the study.

1. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of respondents in federal and state universities on the causes of conflict in universities in North-Central Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of respondents in federal and state universities on methods of conflict management in universities in North-Central Nigeria.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of respondents in federal and state universities on the impact of communication on conflict management in universities in North-Central Nigeria.

## **Literature Review**

### **Concept of Conflict**

Conflict has been observed to exist in all human organisations, including universities. It could be described as all forms of opposition, disagreement, and friction between two or more parties, and it manifests in the forms of arguments, protests, demonstrations, aggression, and destructive behaviours.

Fadipe (2000) defined conflict as a form of disagreement in an establishment between two individuals or groups who have cause to interact formally or informally. According to Enyi (2001), conflict can be regarded as a situation where disputants are hostile to each other in their efforts to achieve goals which are at variance with each other. Conflict is a disagreement between two or more parties who perceive that they have incompatible concerns. This incompatibility can be about needs, interests, values, or aims (Bloisi, 2007). Nye (2001) conceptualised conflict as 'mutual hostility' at the interpersonal, inter-human, inter-group, inter-ethnic, inter-cultural, and international levels. According to the above definitions, conflict is a fact of human existence and a natural part of our daily lives. "Conflict" refers to the act of colliding, clashing, or being in opposition or at variance with another individual or a group of individuals. It equally means strife, controversy, discord of action, disagreement in opinions, and antagonism of interest or principle (Harks, 2001). Adejuwon and Okewale (2009) view conflict as the result of interaction among people, an unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions, and an expression of the basic fact of human interdependence. Conflicts are inherent and inevitable in any human organisation. It occurs when two or more values, perspectives, and opinions are

contradictory in nature and have not been aligned or agreed upon yet, including when values and perspectives are threatened (Fisher, 2000). Robbins and Judge (2009) conceptualised conflict as a process that begins where one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that the former party cares about. George and Jones (2007) saw organizational conflict as the struggle that arises when the goal-directed behaviour of one person or group blocks the goal-directed behaviour of another person or group.

Pondy, in George and Jones (2007), viewed conflict as a dynamic process that consists of five sequential stages.

*Latent Conflict* – there is actually no conflict at this stage. However, the potential to cause conflict is present, though hidden.

*Perceived Conflict* – This stage occurs when one party realizes that conflict exists because it recognizes that its goals are being obstructed by the actions of another party. At this point, each party begins to search for the origin and the cause of the conflict, analyses the event that led to the occurrence of the conflict, and is able to state clearly that a conflict exists.

*Felt Conflict* – At this stage, each party to the conflict develops a negative and hostile feeling against the other party. The parties develop an "us versus them" mentality and start blaming each other for the conflict. Now, as the parties to the conflict argue out their view, it is usually blown out of proportion, and conflict ensues.

*Manifest Conflict* – Once a party becomes aware of the conflict, it decides to react and develop strategies for addressing the other party, which it believes is the source of the conflict. Also, both parties begin to hurt one another and thwart each other's goals. Manifest conflict can take the form of open aggressiveness or even violence between people, and groups may occur.

*Aftermath of Conflict* – sooner or later, in one way or another, someone gets fired and serves as a scapegoat, and the organisation reorganises and even fails as a result of the conflict. Every conflict episode leaves an aftermath that affects the way both parties perceive and respond to future conflicts.

### **Methods of Conflict Management**

Conflict could be managed in various ways. Igboaka (2018) believes that conflict could be managed through the following methods:

**Good governance:** Running affairs of government in positive and progressive manners beneficial to the governed, which delivers the maintenance of law and order, and which delivers the public goods. Normally, it is characterised by democratisation, maintenance of law and order, accountability, transparency, due process, rule of law, human rights, free press, and respect for others.

**Peace Education:** This is a deliberate attempt to educate people in the dynamics of conflict and the promotion of peace-making skills in houses, schools and communities using all the channels of socialisation. It aims to reach people about peace.

**Communication:** This is the process of sharing information between individuals, groups, and parties in a conflict situation. It also involves interaction and relating with others, ensuring Parties involved in a conflict should communicate verbally and share information about the true causes and effects of the conflict.

**Collaboration:** A process in which parties to a conflict work together to resolve conflict through dialogue or other joint endeavours. This process can involve the joint execution of projects or collaborative efforts to build trust and confidence between individuals and groups.

**Negotiation:** A process through which parties to a conflict resolve their problems themselves, normally through dialogue.

**Mediation:** A process of intervention in a conflict by a third party who assists the parties to a conflict to resolve it. It is assisted by a third party where the parties to a conflict admit that they have a dispute which they are both committed to solving. It is carried out through specialised communication and negotiation.

**Conciliation:** A conflict management process similar to mediation. It is a third-party activity that involves intermediary efforts aimed at persuading parties to a conflict to work towards a peaceful resolution. It involves facilitating a peace process.

**Arbitration:** The process by which a neutral third party, normally an authority, hears from the disputants and thereafter renders a decision that must be binding on the parties in a conflict. According to Obiora (2018), the third-party addresses conflict with a fact-finding exercise by consulting the two parties in the conflict separately before meeting them together.

**Adjudication:** A non-violent method of conflict management where courts of law resolve conflicts through judicial pronouncements.

**Crisis management:** It is a process through which extensive situations of conflict are managed. Normally, crisis management becomes necessary when conflict degenerates into extreme violence with a threat to human life; government intervenes to bring about normalcy and calm. Crisis management aims at restoring law and order where it has broken down and demands extreme measures to be taken to achieve it (Best, 2016; Obikeze, 2015).

### **Communication**

Communication is a major means by which the leading and controlling functions of management are primarily accomplished. In the university system, the vice chancellor

performs communication roles most of the time. He communicates with lecturers, non-academic staff, the student body within the university, and individuals at different times. The vice chancellor also holds meetings at different times with the above-listed groups and delivers important administrative messages that affect their operational functioning in the university; passes written circulars to individuals, groups, and organizations about what is going on at a particular time in the university and its functioning; and consults subordinates, e.g., the university council and the National Universities Commission (NUC) (Mgbekem, 2004).

The vice chancellor passes information about personnel, money, material and other resources which keep the university functional. Information giving and receiving is the lifeblood of university management. When people pass information to one another, they are engaged in communication. Peretomode in Mgbekem (2004) observed that communication pervades all organisations because most organization processes require communication to solve their problems and accomplish goals. Communication is seen as a process through which information is exchanged and understood by two or more people, usually with the intention to motivate or influence behaviour. Robbins and Judge (2009) defined communication as the transfer of information from a sender to a receiver, where the receiver understands the information. He believes that communication serves four major functions, which are control, motivation, emotional expression, and information. Effective communication is the transfer of a message followed by feedback from the receiver to the sender indicating the receiver's understanding of the message.

Communication is also viewed as the process of sharing and exchanging information between individuals, groups, and potential parties in a conflict situation. It is the process of interacting and relating with others, implying that parties in conflict still discuss with one another. The exchange and sharing of information can help to remove doubts and suspicion and promote the process of confidence building. Communication relates to the presence and sharing of accurate information about a conflict situation and being able to talk about the feelings and concerns of the parties (Anyadike, 2016).

### **Impact of Communication on Conflict Management**

According to Pikas in D'Souza (2001), effective communication is the key to resolving conflicts. Pikas observed that a breakdown of communication is often the factor of greatest significance in many conflict situations, not only in educational institutions but also in the wider context of environmental issues and world politics. When information is lacking in organisations, speculation and rumours on issues of importance become widespread; this generates a high level of suspicion, resulting in conflict. Imhabekhai (2001) opined that adequate communication clears doubt, ignorance, and rumours which often generate conflict.

According to Denga (2008), effective information management in work organisation tends to facilitate organisational stability and peace, while reckless handling of information may ruin an organisation. Denga submitted that when information arteries are blocked or

stultified, it becomes easy for the management opponents to fabricate stories and “add flesh to real bones to make news sensational.” He further stressed that the chances of inflating news are, however, destroyed when the flow of information is free. Denga views this as a necessity in order to prevent conflicts arising from gross misinformation. Communication is a critical factor in effective conflict management. By improving the opportunity, ability, and motivation to share information, conflicting parties develop fewer extreme perceptions of each other than if they rely on stereotypes and emotions. Direct communication provides a deeper understanding of the other party's work environment and resource limitations (Dugguh, 2004). A better understanding among the parties or groups in an organisation, like the university system, is likely to reduce the chances of conflict in the organisation. Dugguh (2004) identified communicating effectively as an essential factor in conflict resolution. He stressed that effective negotiators communicate in a way that maintains an effective relationship between the parties in dispute. This may facilitate negotiations and consequently minimise conflict in industrial and labour organisations, including universities.

Nwachukwu (2007) identified two types of communications relevant to peacebuilding and conflict management. These are the downward and upward communications. According to Nwachukwu, the major channels used in downward communication include chain of command, posters and bulletin boards, company periodicals, employee pamphlets, information racks, loudspeakers and intercom systems, the organisation grapevine, annual reports, and labour unions. He identified channels of upward communication as the chain of command, the grievance procedures, an open-door policy, the organisation grapevine, labour. This includes unions, informers, and ombudspersons. Effective conflict management demands that in upward and downward communication, the management should create a favourable climate for the free flow of information. Upward communication is very necessary in promoting harmonious human relations. Nwachukwu opined that it is through this means that the management monitors the feelings of employees in organisations and takes appropriate action to correct what would otherwise lead to costly labour-management conflict.

Conversely, conflict is encouraged in an organisation when channels of legitimate expression are closed. Open channels of communication encourage the expression of tensions which otherwise would remain hidden until they probably blow up and wreck the establishment. Most incidents of conflict and students' militancy in the universities could be attributed to the existence of wide communication gaps. When communication channels are open, the relationship between individuals and groups operating in the universities will be enhanced. This is likely to minimise conflict in the universities.

### **Material and Method**

The study was a descriptive survey design. Nigeria is divided into six geopolitical zones (north-central, north-east, north-west, south-east, south-south, and south-west). The area of study is north-central Nigeria. This has seven federal and six state universities approved by the National Commission for Universities (NUC). The populations for the

study comprise 11,293 personnel in federal and state universities in the north-central region (5,762 in federal and 5,531 in state universities). The sample size consists of 446 respondents, made up of 280 personnel in federal and 166 personnel in state universities. A proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to select three federal and three state universities. In each of the universities, a faculty was randomly selected. Two hundred and eighty personnel were randomly drawn from the three federal universities, while 166 were also drawn from the three state universities. The instrument for data generation was a questionnaire titled “Communication and Conflict Management Questionnaire (CCMQ).” The questionnaire was clustered into three subheadings according to the three research questions. The items were presented on a 4-point Likert-type scale: SA (Strongly agree), A (Agree), D (Disagree), and SD (Strongly Disagree).

The instrument underwent face validation by three experts. To ascertain the reliability of the instrument, the validated instrument was trial-tested using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability coefficient obtained using Cronbach's alpha was 0.77. The instrument was administered by the researcher and two research assistants. The data collected were analysed using mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (SD) to answer the research questions, while the  $t$ -test statistic was used in testing the three null hypotheses. Items of the research questions with a mean score of 2.50 and above were regarded as accepted, while any item with a mean score below 2.50 was rejected.

### Research Question One

What are the causes of conflict in universities in North-Central Nigeria?

**Table 1:** Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations of Respondents on causes of conflicts in universities

S/N	Item Statement	Federal uni. =N280,			State uni. = N166		
		$\bar{x}$	SD	Dec	$\bar{x}$	SD	Dec
1	Communication gaps between individuals and groups in the university.	3.01	0.30	A	3.02	0.41	A
2	Highhandedness by the university management.	2.71	0.45	A	2.78	0.41	A
3	Inadequate funding of universities.	2.93	0.30	A	2.99	0.47	A
4	Failure to honour agreements arising from collective bargaining.	3.04	0.54	A	2.97	0.47	A
5	Poor working conditions.	2.88	0.43	A	2.99	0.45	A
<b>Cluster Mean</b>		<b>2.91</b>	<b>0.22</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>2.95</b>	<b>0.19</b>	<b>A</b>

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of respondents based on the causes of conflict in universities. The result shows that items 1-5 had mean ratings above the 2.50

criterion level for accepting an item. The cluster mean of 2.93 for federal universities and 2.89 for state universities shows that both the federal and state universities had cluster mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. This shows that communication gaps between individuals and groups in the university, highhandedness by the university management, inadequate funding, poor working conditions, and failure to honour agreements arising from collective bargaining are some of the causes of conflict in the universities.

### **Hypothesis One**

There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of respondents in federal and state universities on the causes of conflict in universities.

**Table 2:** t-test analysis of the mean ratings of respondents in federal and state universities on the causes of conflict in universities.

University	N	Mean	SD	Df	T	P
Federal	280	2.93	.19	510	0.04	0.92
State	166	2.89	.18			

The result in Table 2 shows the t-test for independent samples assuming equal variance. The result shows  $t (510) = 0.04$ ,  $P = 0.92$ . Hence, the null hypothesis of no significant difference between the mean ratings of federal and state universities on the causes of conflicts in universities in North-Central Nigeria is retained. This is because the probability value of 0.92 is greater than the level of significance set at 0.05.

### **Research Question Two**

What are the various methods of conflict management in federal and state universities in North-Central Nigeria?

**Table 3:** Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations of Respondents on Strategies for Conflict Management in Universities in North-Central Nigeria.

<b>Federal uni. =280,      State uni. =166</b>							
<b>S/N</b>	<b>Item Statement</b>	<b>Federal</b>			<b>State.</b>		
		<b><math>\bar{x}</math></b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Dec</b>	<b><math>\bar{x}</math></b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Dec</b>
1	Dialogue.	3.28	0.30	A	3.27	0.41	A
2	Negotiation.	3.25	0.45	A	3.23	0.41	A
3	Collaboration.	3.01	0.30	A	2.99	0.47	A
4	Conciliation.	2.54	0.54	A	2.54	0.47	A
5	Arbitration.	2.81	0.43	A	2.80	0.45	A
<b>Cluster Mean</b>		<b>2.99</b>	<b>0.22</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>2.97</b>	<b>0.19</b>	<b>A</b>

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation of respondents on methods for conflict management in universities in north-central Nigeria. The result shows that items 1-5 had mean ratings above the 2.50 criterion level for accepting an item. The cluster mean of 2.93 for federal universities and 2.89 for state universities show that both the federal and state universities had cluster mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that dialogue, negotiation, collaboration, conciliation, and arbitration are effective strategies employed in conflict management in the universities.

### **Hypothesis Two**

There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of respondents in federal and state universities on the methods of conflict management in universities in North-Central Nigeria.

**Table 4:** t-test analysis of the mean ratings of respondents in federal and state universities on the methods of conflict management in universities in North-Central Nigeria.

University	N	Mean	SD	Df	T	P
Federal	280	2.93	.14	510	-0.06	0.94
State	166	2.89	.15			

The result in Table 4 shows an independent sample t-test, assuming equal variance. The result shows  $t(510) = -0.06$ ,  $P = 0.94$ . Hence, the null hypothesis of no significant difference between the mean ratings of respondents in federal and state universities on methods of managing conflicts in universities in North-Central Nigeria is retained. The decision was based on the fact that the probability value (0.92) is greater than the level of significance set at 0.05. This implies that the universities do not differ significantly as far as it concerns the methods used in conflict management.

### **Research Question Three**

What is the impact of communication on conflict management in universities in North-Central Nigeria?

**Table 5:** Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Respondents on the Impact of Communication on Conflict Management in Universities in North-Central Nigeria.

**Federal Uni. =280, State Uni. = 166**

S/N	Item Statement	Federal			State		
		$\bar{x}$	SD	Dec	$\bar{x}$	SD	Dec
1	Information dissemination removes doubt and suspicion, which minimises the chances of conflict in the university.	3.23	0.30	A	3.21	0.41	A
2	Communication prevents misinterpretation of needs and feelings of conflicting parties.	3.11	0.45	A	3.09	0.41	A
3	Open channels of communication enhance good relationships among individuals and groups in the university, which helps in reducing conflict.	3.19	0.30	A	3.11	0.47	A
4	Communication facilitates dialogue aimed at resolving various conflicts in the university.	3.32	0.54	A	3.28	0.47	A
5	Communication facilitates collective bargaining, which minimizes conflict at the university.	2.97	0.43	A	2.99	0.45	A
<b>Cluster Mean</b>		<b>3.16</b>	<b>0.22</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>3.14</b>	<b>0.19</b>	<b>A</b>

Table 5 shows the mean and standard deviation of respondents on the impact of communication on conflict management in universities in north-central Nigeria. The result shows that items 1-5 had mean ratings above the 2.50 criterion level for accepting an item. The cluster mean of 3.16 for federal universities and 3.14 for state universities shows that both the federal and state universities had cluster mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that information dissemination removes doubt and suspicion, which minimizes chances of conflict in the university; communication prevents misinterpretation of needs and feelings of conflict parties; and open channels of communication enhance good relationship among individuals and groups in the university, which helps in reducing conflict. Communication facilitates dialogue aimed at resolving various conflicts in the universities; communication also facilitates collective bargaining and minimizes conflict in the university.

### **Hypothesis Three**

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of respondents in federal and state universities on the impact of communication on conflict management in universities in North-Central Nigeria.

**Table 6:** t-test analysis of the mean ratings of respondents in federal and state universities on the impact of communication on conflict management in universities in North-Central Nigeria.

University	N	Mean	SD	Df	T	P
Federal	280	2.66	.20	510	0.97	0.33
State	166	2.64	.19			

The result in Table 6 shows the t-test for independent samples assuming equal variance. The result shows  $t(510) = 0.97$ ,  $P > 0.05$ . Hence, we retain the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of respondents in federal and state universities regarding the impact of communication on conflict management in universities in North-Central Nigeria. This is because the probability value of 0.33 is greater than the level of significance set at 0.05.

### Discussion of Results

Findings show that communication gaps between individuals and groups in the university, highhandedness by university management, inadequate funding by university management, failure to honour agreements arising from collective bargaining, and poor working conditions are causes of conflicts in universities. This finding aligns with Njoku's (2006) and Ademola's (2009) assertion that the communication gap is a major cause of conflict. The finding also lends credence to Anyadike's (2018) contention that scarcity of information, or lack of it most times, generates conflict. It is perhaps in line with this opinion Pikas in D'Souza (2001) observed that communication breakdowns are often a significant factor in many conflict situations, not only within educational institutions but also in the broader context of environmental issues and world politics. The current finding is also in support of Omisore and Abiodun's (2014) discovery that resource scarcity leads to conflict. Because each person who needs the same resources necessarily undermines others who pursue their own goals. Limited resources may include money, supplies, people, or information. However, as both factions make more and more use of the computer, access becomes a problem, and conflict may erupt at this point.

The finding of the study shows that dialogue, negotiation, collaboration, conciliation, and arbitration were important methods used in conflict management in the universities. The finding appears similar to Ihuarulam's (2015) discovery that dialogue, mediation, and negotiation were, to a significant extent, effective strategies for managing conflict in universities.

The results indicated that communication has a positive impact on conflict management in universities in north-central Nigeria. Both federal and state universities used memos, circulars, notice boards, students' union bodies, and the various trade unions as essential channels of communication. These channels of communication guaranteed a free flow of information between the university administration, staff, and students in the university.

This helped in minimising conflicts in the universities. The finding agrees with Imhabekhai's (2001) opinion that adequate communication clears doubt, ignorance, and rumour, which often generates conflict. The finding is also in consonance with Denga's (2008) assertion that effective information management facilitates organisational stability and peace. The finding supports Nwachukwu's (2007) view that it is through communication that the management monitors the feelings of employees in organisations and takes appropriate actions to correct what would otherwise lead to costly labour management conflict. The result may also be because communication enables individuals and groups in the university to engage in meaningful dialogue aimed at resolving conflict.

### **Conclusion**

Effective communication is essential if the universities are to achieve set objectives efficiently. Without effective communication, human interaction would be unfeasible. There will be no room for genuine resolution of conflict. Conflict can be effectively managed when proper communication is put in place by the university management. It therefore behooves the university management to ensure free flow of information at all times. This will help to dispel rumours, doubts, and suspicion which often generate conflict. It will also create the enabling environment for dialogue, negotiations, and eventual resolution of conflict between and among various parties in the universities.

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