



# **Conflict Management Strategies And Lectures Job Commitment In Public Higher Institution In Imo State, Nigeria**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Conflict management strategies play very important roles in the management in public higher institution system for the overall interest of education sector. This study examined the influence of conflict management strategies on lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo State, Nigeria. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. The hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. The study adopted a correlational research design. A total of 840 lecture drawn randomly from twenty five public higher institution in Imo State Nigeria were sampled for the study. Instruments were developed, validated and used for the study. The internal consistency of the instruments were determined using Cronbach Alpha method which gave .720, .812 and .785. Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire (CMSQ) and Lectures Job Commitment Questionnaire (LJCD) respectively. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was used to answer the research questions while simple Regression Analysis was used to test the hypotheses. The data obtained were analyzed which revealed among others the following findings that medication conflict management strategy significantly influenced lectures job commitment; avoidance conflict management strategy significant influence lectures job commitment and confrontation communication strategy significant influence lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo, State Nigeria. The concluded that conflict manager strategies are good elements in the management of public higher institution in Imo, State Nigeria and would engender strong commitment to duties among public higher institution employees particularly the lecture. The study recommended for smooth running of the public higher institution policy, the public higher institution administrators should ensure proper clarification of duties of staff and proper allocation of scarce resources to avoid role conflicts and keep the public higher institution stable. Public higher institution administrators should ensure that non-violence means is employed in the management and resolution of conflicts in the public higher institution system.

**Keywords:** administrators, Conflict management, Job Commitment, communication strategy

## **INTRODUCTION**

Conflict management strategies play very important roles in the management of public higher institution system for the overall interest in the educations sector. Education which is a tool of the society that enables an individual to live effectively and efficiently for his or her own benefit and that of the society had lived for ages up to the present. In Nigeria education system, it is the apex of education ladder, not only in Nigeria, but all over the globe. The name might differ in some countries, but in most places, it is

the same. The public higher institution education covers post primary schools section of education which is the terminal stage of education starting from the ages 12 years and above. The students spend 6 years of study in the public higher institution expending on the field of study. The policy of education in Nigeria as stated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014), made it clear that public higher institution is part of post primary school education. It is the education given after secondary education. It stated that the goals of a public higher institution education shall be to contribute relevant manpower training; develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society; develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment, acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society; promote and encourage scholarship and community service, forge and cement national unity and promote national and international understanding and interaction. It stated further that for the above goals to be achieved, universities education must vigorously pursue teaching, research and development programmes, staff development programme among others

Lectures are important figures in any nation and are authorities in public higher institution educational system. This is because apart from their primary role in curriculum implementation, their commitment towards students in the classroom is also very important in the achievement of the goal of teaching and learning. Modebelu (2019) defined lecture as a group of people or individuals trained specifically to impart knowledge and skills to student to enable them develop healthy attitude and live peacefully with their fellow humans. As lecture in the public higher institution system they are expected to effectively guide and control learning process for the purpose of achieving pre-determined educational objectives as enshrined in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014). The lectures may also be described as councillors (Achimugu, 2015) because of the roles they play in helping students attain their educational goals and programmes where they make decisions and implement its policies and programmes.

In order to maintain harmony in the public higher institution system in the relationship of lecture and commitment to duty, there must be strategies put in place to curb any arising and expected but understandable consequence of relationship-conflicts and disputes that arise from the day to day operation. Conflict is the total range of behaviour and attitudes that express opposition and divergent orientation between lectures or individuals and managers on the one hand, lecture and students and lecture and fellow lecture on the other hand. In addition, Ughamadu (2012) saw conflict as a natural phenomenon that is known to human societies all over the world. She maintained that conflict can neither be eliminated nor suppressed. In other words conflict must exist and the idea of human societies without conflict is utopian as long as man remains a social animal. Conflicts in human society and even in the animal kingdom is most often brought about by insatiable desires thereby making him very vulnerable to disagreement and quite often lead to violent conflicts which are of many types and magnitude causing shootings, fighting, quarrelling and destruction of lives and properties.

Onyishi (2015) defined conflicts as the inability of union and management to reach an agreement on any issue connected with the object of industrial interaction, whether or not, this conflict results in strike, lockout or other forms of protestation. Conflict could be overt or covert. Covert conflict is usually regarded as a cold war which is dangerous because it harbours feeling of resentment of the individuals. The consequences of conflict in any organization especially in the public higher institution system are often times very devastating and might result in wasteful use of human and material resources leading to low productivity, retrenchment, dismissal and alienation. Conflict can manifest itself in the form of unrest, peaceful demonstration, work stoppage (strike), sabotage, absenteeism, work to rule, lockout and others. Conflict is a recurring decimal in all human relationship. The public higher institution like other modern institutions is not without potential negative features, incompatible behaviours and conflicts. The word conflict brings to mind images such as antagonism, struggles between parties, opposition processes and threats to co-operation. Fadipe (2016) saw conflict as a form of disagreement in an establishment between two individuals or groups who have cause to interact formally or informally. Miller (2015) saw it as disagreement between two or more individuals over compatible goals. Conflict, therefore is a process

of incompatible behaviours. It means that people are working against each other in such a manner that what one wants is incompatible with that which another wants.

Okeke (2017) found out that management and lecture in public higher institution in Nigeria have conflicts over roles, lectures non-compliance with management's directives, lectures disregard for lectures welfare, communication gap, lectures indiscipline, negligence of duties and rivalry between management and lectures thereby hindering the attainment of public higher institution objectives. Okeke note that lack of participation from decision-making was associated with conflict between the management and lecture. Udemezie (2018) also opined that in many public higher institution in Imo State, Nigeria, conflict between lecture and management exist. This had resulted in petitions against colleagues. Uzoalu (2016) found out that in most public higher institution in the Zone, many administrators and their lecture are at war for one reason or another. Communication gaps, aggression, backbiting, petition writing and inciting students against public higher institution authorities are manifestations of the conflict. As a result of the conflict between the administrators and their lecture, the performance of the lecture is usually negatively affected and commitment to their job at the lowest level. Based on the above, in absolute terms and based on evidence of clinical practice, there might be no possibility of individuals interacting and groups existing together without conflicts. Indeed conflicts occur between people in all kinds of human relationships and in all social setting. The absence of conflicts in human interactions often signals absence of meaningful interaction. In real practice, conflict is neither good nor bad. Whatever picture or meaning one gives to it is highly determined by one's feelings, values, expectations, development, wakeup and beliefs.

Again, the manner in which one handles conflict indicates whether they are constructive or destructive. Uwaoma (2012), stated that conflict occurs in situation where goals, interest or values of people are incompatible and block other persons' efforts to realize their aims. Fisher in Uwaoma was of the view that conflict entails an incompatibility of goals or values between two or more parties in a relationship, combined with attempts to control each other and antagonistic feelings towards each other. Conflict is an inescapable reality for workers in organizations. Conflict can take much forms. It might be a disagreement about how to complete a task or allocate money or personality clash as mostly observed among lecture or between associates. It is an inevitable part of organizational life. As observed by many experts in human resource and personnel management, conflict is not always bad for a group or organization but if improperly diagnosed or left unchecked, it could be a highly destructive force. Oboegbulam and Onwurah (2014) noted that too much conflict or constant conflict can create a problem in any workplace environment where satisfaction and performance are low and absenteeism and turnover are high. Great administrators and managers know this very well and so apply conflict management strategies to control and prevent conflict from becoming destructive. Onyishi (2013) observed that procedure for handling conflict differs from organization to organization.

A conflict strategy or procedure is any method designed to resolve conflict between workers and their employers or between lecture and lecture. There could be intra or extra union conflict, that is conflict within a particular organization membership or an organization versus another organization respectively. Conflict strategies involve a set of procedural rules incorporating all or any of the following: a grievance procedure, a disciplinary procedure, a dismissal procedure, a redundancy procedure and a negotiating procedure. Foresighted employer adopts a conflict management strategy or procedure before commencing employment and production while others are forced by workers' protests to fashion out one (Onyishi, 2015). Wherever conflict arises in an organization there are set down stages for the aggrieved worker to report the problem and to seek solution to the conflict. The Classical organization theorists believed that conflict produced inefficiency and was therefore undesirable, detrimental to the organization and should be eliminated or at least minimized to the extent possible (dysfunctional conflict). Perceptions about conflict changed with the emergence of social systems and open system theory. According to the social system theories, conflict is one of the central forms of interaction. Conflict is normal and positive as well as negative. This view was supported by Roarda (2019) that conflict is normal and functional because it

brings about positive changes in an organization. Conflict, however, becomes negative if it is not managed and allowed reaching a dysfunctional stage.

Conflict in an employment relationship had been an issue of continuing interest and debate. Conflict is a common occurrence in organizational life. It occurs when a desired goal or objective, the desire to obtain more in both economic (wages and benefit) and non-economic (contract provisions and operation practices) areas. Labour union also expects to make these gains via the bargaining process, the grievance and arbitration procedure and management default. The organized organizational union on the other hand, resists all efforts of the union to restrict management freedom to make decision necessary to run organization properly. Conflict in organized organization like the public higher institution had been developed for the available amicable settlement of these disputes. One of such procedures lies in the institutionalization of grievance device like collective resolution of these conflicts determine the success or otherwise of the organization. Organizational leaders need to manage conflicts between individuals in order to have a positive effect on organization.

Many of the studies on the impact of conflict management on organizational performance were done outside Nigeria. These studies particularly focus on educational institutions. In Nigeria, most of the available studies about conflict management such as Adebile and Ojo (2012), Bankole and Lawal (2012) and Obasan (2018) investigated causes of conflicts across various organizational settings and suggested several measures or strategies for managing organizational conflict. These researches have also theoretical studies whose findings were subjectively based on researchers' personal opinions. It was noted that the past studies did not give attention to the impact of conflict management on organizational performance, as well as highlighting effective conflict management strategy that can stimulate better organizational performance. It is perceived that the strategies developed by management to resolve or manage conflicts could increase subordinates' satisfaction and subordinates with high levels of satisfaction commitment are more likely to be committed to the organization, thereby, improving organizational performance.

Drawing from the multiplicity of empirical and theoretical investigations in organizational behaviour literature, many scholars and management practitioners had acknowledged the indispensability of the human aspect of organizational resources. For instance, Tamunomiebi and Wobodo (2012) reiterated that amid all organizational resources, the employees still remain the life blood of the organization as its success or failure depends largely on their performance and commitment to its mission. However, the implication of this is that the employees can make or mar the organization's mission depending on how they perceive their policies and practices especially in relation to organizational justice. Therefore, when an organization's policies and practices are anchored on the principles of justice, equity and fairness among its stakeholders, such environment is perceived as a breeding ground for organizational harmony. Organizational harmony within organizations is considered very paramount for employees' success at work and other aspects of life; and fosters synergy which is critical to task accomplishment and stability in life (Yusuf- Habeeb & Kazeen, 2017). This attention became necessary according to Osamwonyi and Ugiagbe (2013) who observed that in Nigeria, many organizations are faced with unabated organizational conflicts caused by inefficient management styles and lack of leadership skills as well as strained relationship between management and employees' representatives. Similarly, Nworgu (2015) cautioned that lack of quality leadership skills is likely to instigate industrial disharmony or standoff between administrators, managers and employees. Furthermore, Iheriohanma (2017) revealed that management practice of exclusionism, neglect of power sharing mechanism which ensures partnership amongst stakeholders in the workplace and derogation of organizational communication pattern would also contribute in breeding disharmony and conflict in contemporary workplaces. More so, where this situation persists, it might slide the organization into early entropy; given the position of Yusuf-Habeeb and Kazeen (2017) that conflict has taken a precarious dimension in Nigeria and as a matter of necessity requires cogent approach towards its proper management and transformation as essentials for peace and progress in the workplace while Nwokocha (2015) pointed out that productivity in most organizations has comparatively been hindered due to frequent industrial conflict. Similarly, the Nigeria public higher

institution is not left out of these perturbations, despite its strategic importance in nation building. Such perturbation revolves around the general issue of poor education funding.

As a result, there had been infrastructural dearth in almost all the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Also, this constraint undoubtedly makes many academic and non-academic staff of these institutions to work under perplexing circumstance that result in conflict. For instance, the public higher institution is still finding it difficult to build all the necessary state of the art facilities such as lecture halls and offices, student hostels, equipped laboratories, workshops etc. to promote quality education programme as stipulated by the United Nation. Another challenge faced by the tertiary institution workers is the recurring issue of inadequate reward and motivation. Famade (2012) observed that lectures' motivation in Nigeria has died out, their status waned, thereby making it a threatened profession; this is mainly the cause of intermittent strike action to sway the government into doing the needful.

Similarly, Onayese and Onayese (2015) identified that in public higher institution in Imo, State Nigeria in Nigeria are under a siege and almost ruined by secrete cults' activities. As a result, majority of lecture and students live in perpetual fear as some of these cult groups most times indulge in assassinations, rape, and infrastructure destruction. On this note, Hussein, Salem Al-Mamary and Hassan (2017) argued that conflict is impossible to be avoided but very possible to be managed when the systems are diagnosed. In the same vein, effective management of conflict can be achieved through the adoption of potent strategies to foster industrial harmony at workplaces. To the researcher's surprise, as potent as conflict management strategies in sustaining harmonious industrial relations, he has not seen much of research evidence especially, theoretical papers in this direction. This is as some of the studies in this domain adopted other variables while some were conducted outside the context of institutions of interest. For instance, Taher, Das and Rashed (2018) carried out a study on conflict management and its impact on organizational performance in some industrial enterprises in Bangladesh. Kassim (2017) on the other hand investigated conflict management styles and organizational commitment among bank employees in Penang. Another study by Akume and Abdullahi (2013) focused on the challenges and prospects of effective organizational conflict resolution in Nigeria. On the other hand Uzoechina (2016), saw conflict as a natural and vital part of life. It is essential and unavoidable. There is a likelihood of personal likes and dislikes that lead to conflict in any organization. She stated that in institutions like the public higher institution, conflict occurs between various individuals including lecture because of their frequent interactions with each other. She noted that in educational institutions which are formal organizations with highly centralized bureaucracies, conflicts both manageable and overt come to bear a lot. This is because, educational institutions like other human organizations are prone to one or other types of conflict. These conflicts might however be in form of public higher institution management versus lecture, public higher institution leadership versus students' conflict, lecture versus lectures conflict, and lecture versus students' conflict. It is important to note that there might be also conflicts among public higher institution administrators, policy implementation and authority. Various conflict management strategies are however adopted for handling conflicts including but not limited to mediation, negotiation, avoidance, collaborating, accommodation, confrontation, compromising and domination etc, (Uzoechina, 2016 and Ibe & Okoyeocha, (2013).

On this note, Ughamadu (2012) added arbitration, conciliation, adjudication, communication, boxing the problem, neglect or silence, prayer and oath taking. Mediation in conflicts is a problem solving process in which two parties in the dispute or their representative meet face to face to work together to resolve the dispute assisted by a neutral third party called the mediator. Another strategy adopted in the management of conflict is negotiation. It is a problem solving process in which either the two parties in the dispute or their representatives meet face to face to work together with a view to resolving the problem, course of action to settle the disagreement with the sole aim to produce a solution that all parties could agree on, work as quickly as possible to find the solution and to improve, not hurt the relationship between the groups in conflict.

Avoidance is another good strategy. Cross (2013) noted that avoidance conflict strategy involves one of the conflicting parties avoiding communicating about or confronting the problem, hoping that it would go

away. By not participating in the problem solving process, he is effectively removing himself from it. When one is employing avoidance strategy, the conflict might go away if the other party did not press for a resolution. The underlying differences between the parties would never be resolved. Times when the avoiding mode is appropriate would be when one has issues of how important, it would be to reduce tensions, to buy some times or even when one is in a position of lower power. Collaboration as a strategy of conflict management was theorized by Thibaut and Walker (2018). Chand (2013) pointed out that applying a collaborative strategy of conflict resolution is assertive as well as cooperative involving the use of dialogue and just opposite of avoiding. This strategy could also be called integrative method which focuses on satisfying the underlying concerns of both parties, meeting many current needs by working together. Through this strategy, employees develop ownership and commitment to their work. This strategy involves trust, confidence and mutual respect. As there is oneness, communication is enhanced and progress is achieved (Ughamadu, 2012).

Another strategy in conflict management is the consensus decision-making. This is a group problem solving process in that all the parties in the conflict or representatives of each party collaborate to resolve the dispute by crafting a plan of action that all parties would support. This process might or might not be facilitated by neutral party. Competing as a strategy in conflict management is high assertiveness and low cooperation. Times when the cooperating mode is appropriate are when quick action needs to be taken, when unpopular decision is to be made, when vital issues must be handled, or when one is protecting self-interest. In adopting this strategy in the management of conflict, certain skills are necessary such as arguing or debating, using rank or influence, asserting your opinion and feelings, standing your ground and stating your position clearly. Accommodation stands out in the list of strategies for conflict management in any organization. Accommodation approach emphasizes cooperation instead of assertiveness. A person places his interest last and allows the other party to further his interest. This strategy takes place when a party is not significantly interested in securing a victory because he does not perceive the alternative option as a significant threat (Cross, 2013). Accommodation is a cooperation method of handling conflicts in any organization. This method offers one party the opportunity to sacrifice one's interest and rights in a relationship so as to maintain the relationship. Times when this strategy is appropriate are to show reasonableness, develop performance, create good will or keep peace. In some organizations, people use the accommodation mode when the issue or outcome is of low importance to them.

In confrontation strategy, assertiveness is the hallmark of this approach and those employing this strategy of negotiation aim to address the conflict head-on. It might involve high levels of emotions as the parties establish positions in what can sometimes evolve into hostile communications. The outcome of confrontation is that at the end, it could leave both parties at loss, that is losing out rightly from the struggle (Cross, 2013). The confrontation as a conflict management strategy entails both parties placing their desires above those of all others involved in the conflict. At this point, it is usually very difficult for resolution to take place. In using this strategy in handling conflict, certain skills are required which include; speaking about the issue, not about your assumption, being aware of and respectful of differences, control your emotions and behaviour, picking your battles, expressing feelings in words not actions, avoiding accusation and above all, having the belief that facing conflict head-on is the best thing for both sides. Another strategy in conflict management is the compromising approach. The compromising strategy of conflict resolution is assertive as well as cooperative in nature. This strategy involves the use of dialogue and just opposite of avoiding. It might also be called integrative strategy which focuses on satisfying the underlying concerns of both parties, meeting many current needs by working together. Times when the compromising mode is appropriate are when you are dealing with issues of moderate importance, when you have equal power status or when you have a strong commitment for resolution. Compromising mode can also be used as a temporary solution when there are time constraints. Thus strategy employees develop are ownership and commitment to their job and organization. Sometimes, this outcome of the strategy is win/win, here both parties come to terms of

proper agreement without either party losing (Cross, 2013). In this case, compromising skills include; finding a middle ground, assessing value and making concessions.

Domination is yet another important strategy in the list of conflict management strategies. It is an assertive and non-cooperative way of resolving conflict in an organization when one party struggles and makes efforts to win while the other party loses. Those who use domination tend to have little insight into the consequences of their own behaviour on other people. They are usually pessimistic about consequence of other groups and tend to delegate responsibility but not sufficient resources. They also tend to withhold information to create dependencies in other groups upon them, the dominators. They react to conflict with other group by being punitive, assertive and withholding resources. It is observed that within their own group, they tend to ignore conflict and tolerate dissidence. Domination strategy require some obvious skills which include; making conflict resolution the priority rather than winning or being right , setting clear rules and boundaries using coercion to turn problem employees around and maximize productivity using rewards and punishment and being firm and stern.

Arbitration strategy is another form of dispute resolution. It is the private, judicial determination of a dispute by an independent third party. An arbitration hearing might involve the use of an individual arbitrators, though some legal systems insist on an odd number for obvious reasons of wishing to avoid a tie. In arbitration strategy, usually, one and three are the most common numbers of arbitrators. The disputing parties hand over their power to decide the dispute to the arbitrators. Arbitration is an alternative to court action or litigation and generally, financial and binding, unlike mediation, negotiation and conciliation which are non-binding (Ughamadu, 2012). Conciliation and mediation sometimes have close meaning but still differ depending on the country or dispute sector involved. In Nigeria for example, it seemed to be more formed than mediation. The arbitration and conciliation Act of 1990, stipulated that the conciliator must be appointed, might use documentary evidence only and might even make recommendations for settlement. With the new United Nations Organization on International Trade Laws (UNCITRAL) rules, however, the controversy between mediation and conciliation has been put to rest. They could now be used interchangeably (Ughamadu, 2012).

Adjudication as the name implies, involves the use of law courts in resolving or handling conflicts. It is also a non-violent style but since litigation are involved, it makes the parties in disputes to keep a distance from each other. It involves hiring the services of lawyers in court of competent jurisdiction, by different clients, after which judgements are given by the presiding magistrate or the judge. The decisions of law courts are not questioned except that appeals could be made in the courts of higher jurisdiction. Once a court's verdict is given and obtained, law enforcement agents might further carry out the implementation of the judgement depending on the need (Ughamadu, 2012). As a result, Ughamadu (2012) observed that effective communication as a conflict management strategy, is important for mediation and negotiation. This is because, according to her, communication is the process by which the mediator reaches out to the disputants. If it is defective, the whole process is wobbled. Besides, communication is the activity to which mediators and negotiators devote an overwhelming proportion of time. Nobody wants to waste time on an activity that would not be affective and truthful. Nonetheless the communicator might not be able to convey exactly what he or she means to communicate, as a result of the inability of the negotiator to eliminate ambiguity, analyze the issue dispassionately and sometimes analyze deficiency in the use of the language of communication in the settling of the disputes.

Another important conflict strategy in managing conflict in an organization is boxing the problem. It is another method of resolving conflict. A conflict can be resolved by coordination device where the problem is identified and recognized and a position is created in the organization to handle the problem. This is followed by the administrator or coordinator being appointed to settle the problem. Ughamadu (2012) noted that this type of problem might be discrimination on the basis of status, religion, and ethnic, organizational injustice, imbalance or distribution of power and roles. Neglect or silence is another strategy that could be used in handling conflict in an organization. Conflict could be neglected or silenced by the Administrators and managers of public higher institution system, to prove to those in conflict that

the conflict is not important to merit attention. In this case, silence involves delay tactics or procrastination which disarms the disputants emotionally and the conflict dies a natural death.

Bargaining is another conflict management strategy employed by chief executives, administrators in an organization in handling and resolving conflicts from time to time. It is a process in which two or more individuals exchange offers, concessions and counter offers in an attempt to resolve their disagreement. In bargaining, if the process is successful, solution acceptable to both sides is attained, then the conflict is brought to an end. This strategy is also called the “live and like road to conflict resolution”. It is important to note that to ensure a successful bargaining, one must maintain open and direct communication between opponents which should be avoided, implicit and explicit threats should be guarded against. For this, flare up tensions and chances of agreement can be sharply reduced, willingness to make concessions is very useful among others.

Prayer and oath taking is yet another very important method of resolving conflicts. Ezegbe cited in Ughamadu (2012), propounded prayer as a strategy and style of conflict handling. According to him, problems could be taken to God who handles or controls all human situations. However, this is only applicable in a place that has one pattern of worship and not in a secular country like Nigeria where Christianity, Islam and African traditional religion worship go *pari pasu* and where every religious sect claim superiority over the other. Having discussed a good number of conflict management strategies, this study however, focused on only four conflict management strategies namely, mediation avoidance, confrontation and communication. These four components of conflict management strategies and four components of communication styles were used as predictors of lectures’ job commitment in public higher institution in Imo State, Nigeria.

Job commitment refers to an individual’s attraction and attachment to the work and the organization. It also refers to the socio-psychological bonding of an individual to his group, work, organization, its goals and values or to his occupation and profession. It could manifest in three ways, that is, effective, normative and continuance and each type of commitment ties the individual to the organization in different ways and would differently affect the manner in which the employee conducts him/herself in the workplace (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnysky, 2014). Adding to the foregoing, Crosswell (2017) is of the opinion that lectures’ commitment is one of the major professional characteristics that influence an educator’s success. Commitment could be defined in various ways. The definitions, however, indicate willingness, loyalty and dedication to a cause/what one believes in. In this study, commitment is seen as the involvement of lecture to the schools’ goals. As to personal businesses, lectures’ commitment is regarded as a key concern in educational systems across the globe, because of its influence on students’ outcomes and general school effectiveness (Park, 2015).

In a public higher institution system, the achievement of educational goals and objectives might be impossible without committed lecture who are the main facilitators of teaching and learning. Taking practical steps at improving lectures’ commitment by both government and school owners is crucial because lecture who are highly committed are likely to stay longer on the job, perform better, get actively involved in the work and public higher institution programmes and go extra miles to ensure that the public higher institution achieves its set goals and objectives. Lectures’ job commitment might be affected by so many factors among which are; relationship between decision on lecture and students, the quality of the work being done by lecture, work environment, policies and decision-making process, motivation and interaction between lectures and management among others. The interaction between management and lectures could be determined by the communication system in the public higher institution. Communication system in any organization, be it formal or informal organization, is very vital to the survival, smooth running and success of the organization. The transfer of information from one person to another within an organization lies on communication process without which managerial, administrative and academic functions might not be possible. In fact, all administrative functions of planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting and budgeting as identified by Gulick (2017) cannot be effectively carried out without effective communication.



Besides, Ekemezie (2015) and Ugbaja (2019) observed that the overall success of an educational organization depends largely on lectures' commitment which directly relates to the level of motivation they have within the organization. Lectures are the main resource for any organizational activities. Thus, lectures' motivation critically receives organizational success. Djurdjevic (2013) defined motivation as the willingness to exert high level of effort and commitments towards organizational goals, conditioned by the efforts and ability to satisfy some individual needs. Commitment is seen as an investment of personal resources and is closely related and connected to staff work performance which could be analyzed to identify centres of commitment to staff professional practice.

However, Buckingham and Goodall (2015) observed that lectures' commitment to work might be affected by dissatisfaction, stress, poor and wrong application of communication styles and non-proper resolution of conflicts and burnout could negatively influence motivation and job commitment as well. Commitment to work and work place had been observed to be improved by psychic rewards (acknowledgment of job competence), meaningful and varied work task, autonomy and participatory decision-making, positive feedback, collaboration, administrative support, reasonable work load, adequate resources and pay, hence job opportunities provide challenges and accomplishment which could only be made possible through serious commitment to the organizational goals and objectives (Igbal, Anwar & Haidas, 2015). Commitment has three major components which include one's affection for his job, continuance to his job, and normative commitment; that is sense of obligation to stay on the job. Affection occurs when you feel a strong emotional attachment to your organization and to the work that you do. Lectures would most likely identify with the organization's goals, objectives and values and they would genuinely want to be there. This is because when a lecturer is enjoying his work and properly communicated, he/she would likely feel good and be satisfied with his job and in turn, this would increase job satisfaction and performance and likely to add to his feeling of affective commitment which would eventually increase the productivity of the organization to achieve the desired organizational goals. (Schneider, Enrart & Macey, 2013).

Continuance commitment is said to be a type of commitment that occurs when a lecturer weighs up the pros and cons of leaving the organization. The lecturer may feel the need to stay in the organization because the loss he would experience by leaving the organization is greater than the benefits he may gain in the new organization. These perceived losses or "side bets" can be monetary, that is salary or other benefits such as position. The lecturer then decides to stay in the organization instead of leaving the organization (Cappelli & Tavis, 2016 and Clifton, 2014). Normative commitment implied sense of obligation to stay in the organization. This type of commitment takes place when a lecturer feels a sense of obligation to his or her organization, even if he or she is unhappy or not satisfied in his role, or even if he wants to pursue better opportunities, he feels that he should stay or continue with the organization because it is the right thing to do. He therefore decides to stay and work for the good of the organization because it is an obligation upon him or her (Rister, 2014). These components could be used by managers to increase commitment and engagement of their staff in the organization as well as help the lectures to experience a greater feeling of well-being and job satisfaction (Obiora, 2013). Based on the above scenario, the researcher decided to carry out this study to look into and investigate conflict management strategies as predictors of lectures' job commitment in public higher institution in Imo State, Nigeria

### **Statement of the problem**

It had been observed by stakeholders in education that lectures' job commitment had been generally poor and not encouraging in the recent past. It was also observed that this poor and unencouraging lectures' job commitment might be connected to conflict management strategies used with the lectures in matters affecting them and also in handling conflicts that arise both between the lectures and the management and even between lectures themselves. These have become the concern of the stakeholders in education sector over the years in public higher institution, Nigeria. If this trend should continue unchecked, would lectures' job commitment be adversely jeopardized? Would the main objectives and goals of public higher institution education be realized? Would the general outcome be negatively affected and poor too? It was therefore the concern of the researcher that the ugly situation needed to be adequately and seriously

addressed so as to proffer lasting solution if possible to the problem, hence the researcher's interest was aroused in this direction to investigate communication styles and conflict management strategies as predictors of lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo State, Nigeria.

### **Purpose of the study**

The main purpose of the study was to investigate influence of conflict management strategies on lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo, State Nigeria. Specifically the study sought to:

1. Ascertain the influence mediation conflict management strategy on lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo State Nigeria.
2. Determine influence of avoidance conflict management strategy on lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo, State Nigeria
3. Find out the influence of confrontation conflict management strategy on lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo, State Nigeria

### **Research questions**

The following research questions guided the conduct of the study:

1. To what extent does mediation conflict management strategy influence lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo, State Nigeria?
2. To what degree does avoidance conflict management strategy influence lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo, State Nigeria?
3. To what level does confrontation conflict management strategy influence lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo, State Nigeria?

### **Hypotheses**

The following nine hypotheses guided the conduct of the study and were tested at .05 level of significant.

- H0<sub>1</sub>: Mediation communication style would not significantly influence lectures job commitment in public high institution in Imo, State Nigeria
- H0<sub>2</sub>: Avoidance conflict management style would not significantly influence lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo, State Nigeria
- H0<sub>3</sub>: Confrontation conflict management style would not significantly influence lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo, State Nigeria

### **METHOD**

The study adopted a correlational research design. The correlational research design according to Stephen (2017), examines the degree, patterns and strength of relationship between two or more variables being studied rather than explore causal relationship between them. This study fits into this design because it seeks to ascertain the relationship between, conflict management strategies and lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo State, Nigeria. The area of the study was public higher institution in Imo. The population of the study comprised 16838 lectures from all the public higher institution in Imo State. The sample of the study is 840 lectures representing 10% of the population in twenty five selected public higher institution in Imo State, Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used in two stages. The instrument for data collection was a researcher structured questionnaire titled Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire (CMSQ) and Lectures Job Commitment Questionnaire (LJCQ). The instruments were subjected to face and construct validation and the reliability of instruments were established through internal consistency and Cronbach Alpha statistics. The reliability yielded coefficients of .75.78, 86 and .85. Thus, the reliability coefficient of all the instruments indicated a positive and high reliability. The distribution was done on wait and collect basis. This way, a measurably high return rate was principle. The researcher and his assistants guided the respondents on how to fill the instrument as the need arose. However, the researcher administrated 840 copies of the questionnaire to the respondents, but was able to retrieve 652 copies representing 78% of the sample. 188copies were lost in the process representing 22% of the sample. This was because some of the respondents refused to cooperate with the researcher in all the public higher institution visited. The data were computed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. The research questions were answered using Pearson's Product Moment

correlation while the hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance using simple regression analysis. The correlation coefficient is depicted by r.

**PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

The result of data collected in the course of this study. The data were presented in tables with the answers to the research questions and testing of the hypotheses. At the end of the presentation, a summary of the results obtained was made.

**Research question 1:** *What is the predictive value of mediation conflict management strategy of lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo state, Nigeria?*

**Table 5: Pearson’s r mediation conflict management strategy influence lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo State Nigeria.**

Variables	N	Mediation Conflict management Strategy	Lectures Job Commitment	Remark
Mediation conflict management strategy	652	1.00	.741	High positive relationship
Lectures job commitment	652	.741	1.00	

The Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r) displayed in table 5 showed that the correlation between mediation conflict management style and lectures job commitment yielded a correlation coefficient (r)=.741 This suggested there was a high positive correlation between use of mediation conflict management strategy and lectures job commitment. This implies that use of mediation conflict management style has high positive predictive value of lectures job commitment.

**Research question 2:** *What is the predictive value of avoidance conflict management strategy of lectures job commitment in in public higher institution in Imo, State Nigeria in Imo State Nigeria?*

**Table 2: Pearson’s r on public higher institution’s avoidance conflict management strategy and lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo State Nigeria.**

Variables	N	Avoidance Conflict Management Strategy	Lectures Job Commitment	Remark
Avoidance conflict management strategy	652	1.00	.753	High positive relationship
Lectures job commitment	652	.753	1.00	

The Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r) displayed in table 6 reveals that the coefficient of correlation(r) between avoidance conflict management strategy and lectures job commitment is .753. This showed that there was a high positive correlation between use of avoidance conflict management strategy and lectures job commitment. This implies that use of avoidance conflict management style has high positive predictive value of lectures job commitment.

**Research question 3:** *What is the predictive value of confrontation conflict management strategy of lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo State Nigeria?*

**Table 3: Pearson’s r on confrontation conflict management style and lectures job commitment**

Variables	N	Confrontation Conflict Management Strategy	Lectures Job Commitment	Remark
Confrontation conflict management strategy	652	1.00	.753	High positive relationship
Lectures job commitment	652	.738	1.00	

Table 3 showed that the coefficient of correlation between confrontation conflict management strategy and lectures job commitment is .738. This indicated that there was a high positive correlation between the use of confrontation conflict management strategy and lectures job commitment. This implies that use of confrontation conflict management style has high positive predictive value of lectures job commitment.

**Hypothesis One:** Mediation conflict management strategy would not significantly predict lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo State , Nigeria.

**Table 4: Test of significance of simple regression analysis with mediation conflict management strategy as predictor of lectures job commitment.**

Variable	B	SEB	$\beta$	t	p-value	Decision
Mediation conflict management strategy	1.389	.057	.742	24.394	.000	Significant

The result in table 13 indicated that the standardized beta ( $\beta$ ) is =.742. This value showed that the contribution of public higher institution 's use mediation conflict management strategy to lectures job commitment was significant, 24.394,  $p < 0.05$ . Since the  $p$ -value was less than 0.05, null hypothesis was rejected.

**Hypothesis Two**

Avoidance conflict management strategy would not significantly predict lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo State, Nigeria.

**Table 14: Test of significance of simple regression analysis with avoidance conflict management strategy as predictor of lectures job commitment.**

Variable	B	SEB	$\beta$	t	p-value	Decision
Avoidance conflict management strategy	1.412	.056	.753	25.339	.000	Significant

The result in table 14 showed that the standardized beta ( $\beta$ ) for the simple regression model using avoidance conflict management strategy as predictor is =.753. This value showed that the contribution of public higher institution's use avoidance conflict management strategy to lectures job commitment was significant,  $t=25.339$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Since the  $p$ -value was less than 0.05, null hypothesis was rejected.

**Hypothesis Three**

Confrontation conflict management strategy would not significantly predict lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo State, Nigeria.

**Table 15: Test of significance of simple regression analysis with confrontation conflict management strategy as predictor of lectures job commitment.**

Variable	B	SEB	$\beta$	t	p-value	Decision
Confrontation conflict management strategy	1.438	.059	.738	24.290	.000	Significant

The result in table 16 showed that the standardized beta ( $\beta$ ) for the simple regression model using confrontation conflict management strategy as predictor of lectures job commitment is =.738. This value showed that confrontation conflict management strategy was a significant predictor of lectures job commitment,  $t=24.920$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Since the  $p$ -value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected.

**Summary of major findings**

The findings of the study were summarized as follows:

- (g). Medication conflict management strategy significantly influenced lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo, State Nigeria.
- (h). Avoidance conflict management strategy significant influence lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo, State Nigeria.
- (i). Confrontation communication strategy significant influence lectures job commitment in public higher institution in Imo, State Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

The findings obtained from this study therefore informed the researcher to conclude that conflict manager strategies are good elements in the management of public higher institution in Imo, State Nigeria and would engender strong commitment to duties among public higher institution employees particularly the lecture. Thus conflict could be propelled by differences between the management and the lecture, management and the students and management and the larger society and the strategies employed in the management and resolution of these conflicts would determine how the conflicts would be amicably resolved in the overall interest of the public higher institution education system for the attainment of the higher institution goals and objectives.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore, based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made.

1. For smooth running of the public higher institution policy, the public higher institution administrators should ensure proper clarification of duties of staff and proper allocation of scarce resources to avoid role conflicts and keep the public higher institution stable.
2. The public higher institution administrators should ensure that non-violence means is employed in the management and resolution of conflicts in the public higher institution system.
3. Government should ensure that the public higher institution system are properly funded and maintained to reduce the constant and prolonged ASUU strike within the public higher institution system.

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