



RESEARCH ARTICLE

EXPLORING PEACE EDUCATION STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING STAFF UNION-ADMINISTRATION RELATIONS IN SOUTH-WEST NIGERIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Public universities have experienced internal conflicts, which sometimes lead to strained relations, particularly between staff unions and administration in the South-West, Nigeria. Previous research has focused mainly on conflict resolution mechanisms in Nigerian universities, with little attention paid to peace education strategies for enhancing industrial harmony in the universities. The Conflict Transformation Theory by John Paul Lederach's was adopted as the theoretical framework for the study. In-depth interviews (IDI) and Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted across sixty-four (64) respondents, involving university administrators and union leaders. Data was content analysed to find the main themes and patterns. Findings reveal that current conflict management strategies, such as avoidance, coercion, negligence, confrontation, strikes, adjudication, and security involvement, have proved largely ineffective. Respondents strongly agreed that peace education strategies, involving dialogue workshops, conflict resolution training, participatory decision-making, and non-violent communication programs, were capable of reducing conflicts and enhancing union-relations. The study argues that peace education offers a transformative approach to achieving industrial harmony. It recommends the adoption of mandatory peace-building training by the National Universities Commission, the establishment of university-based conflict resolution centres, and collaborative model programmes between unions and administrations to foster harmonious engagement, promote institutional stability and nation-building in Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Peace education, industrial harmony, strategy, administration, relations

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

Nigerian public universities were established to promote teaching, learning, research, and national development. However, they increasingly face persistent conflicts between staff unions and university administrations. The principal unions include the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU), Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions (NASU), and National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT). Although conflict is an inevitable aspect of organizational life, arising from differing interests, expectations, and values, in Nigeria, it frequently escalates into strikes, protests, and boycotts that disrupt academic activities and institutional stability.

Between 2015 and 2025, unions such as ASUU engaged in repeated disputes with federal and state governments as well as university administrations. These conflicts largely centred on chronic underfunding, salary renegotiations, earned academic allowances, university autonomy, and poor working conditions. Prolonged strikes at institutions such as the University of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University, Olabisi Onabanjo University, and Lagos State University were often triggered by inadequate funding, controversial vice-chancellor appointments, deteriorating infrastructure, and unsatisfactory welfare conditions. These industrial actions have resulted in prolonged academic closures, delayed graduations, increased brain drain—particularly among lecturers—declining educational standards, and adverse socio-economic effects on students and host communities.

In 2025 alone, developments included a two-week warning strike in October, threats of indefinite action in November, and tense renegotiations marked by allegations of governmental insincerity. These culminated in a significant agreement signed in January 2026, promising a 40 per cent salary increase effective from 1 January 2026, improved allowances, and revitalization funding. Nevertheless, previous agreements—most notably the 2009 Federal Government–ASUU agreement—were either partially implemented or delayed, reinforcing patterns of mistrust.

Traditional conflict management mechanisms in Nigerian public universities have largely been adversarial and reactive. These include confrontational negotiations, punitive measures such as “no work, no pay” policies, coercion, legal proceedings, and crisis-driven bargaining. While such approaches may produce temporary settlements, they rarely address underlying structural problems such as inadequate funding, weak communication systems, lack of transparency, and perceived injustice. As a result, cycles of confrontation and disruption persist.

Much of the existing literature focuses on the causes and economic consequences of strikes, as well as conventional bargaining strategies. However, there is limited exploration of proactive and transformative alternatives. Peace education offers a promising framework to address this gap. As a transformative approach to conflict management, peace education involves cultivating the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary to identify the root causes of conflict and resolve them non-violently. It emphasises collaboration, empathy, tolerance, effective communication, and mutual respect. Rather than concentrating solely on the cessation of open conflict (negative peace), peace education seeks systemic change that fosters constructive relationships and institutional resilience.

Within university settings, peace education promotes dialogue, mediation, critical thinking, and respect for diversity. It equips both union leaders and administrators with the competencies required to engage grievances constructively and prevent escalation. Globally and across Africa, peace education has demonstrated effectiveness in fostering collaborative conflict resolution and sustaining harmony in divided or crisis-affected environments. In Nigeria’s diverse socio-cultural context, strategies such as structured dialogue workshops, conflict resolution training, non-violent



communication programmes, participatory decision-making, and value-based curricula can mitigate tensions between unions and management. Unlike reactive approaches, peace education seeks to transform adversarial relationships into cooperative partnerships. It aligns with international peacebuilding principles and supports sustainable institutional stability, industrial harmony, and broader national development objectives.

This study, therefore, examines peace education strategies as a means of strengthening union-administration relations in public universities in South-west Nigeria. Specifically, it investigates the major causes of conflict between staff unions and university administrations, analyses the prevailing conflict management strategies, and explores peace education approaches capable of promoting enduring industrial harmony and institutional stability.

Research questions

1. What are the major causes of conflicts between staff unions and administrations in public universities in southwest Nigeria?
2. What are the key conflict management strategies currently adopted in managing staff union-administration conflicts in public universities?
3. Which peace education strategies can enhance industrial harmony and institutional stability in public universities?

2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This review examines existing scholarship on conflict, conflict management, and peace education as approaches to managing union-administration disputes in public universities, with particular reference to South-west Nigeria. It considers the causes of conflict, challenges to sustainable peace, and the relevance of peace-oriented strategies.

2.1. Literature Review

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of organizational life. It arises when interdependent parties pursue incompatible interests, needs, values, or goals. In this study, conflict refers to disagreements between staff unions and university administrations that frequently escalate into industrial actions due to competing demands and perceptions of injustice. Conflicts may be functional or dysfunctional. Functional conflict can stimulate dialogue, reform, and organizational growth, whereas dysfunctional conflict generates hostility, disruption, and reduced performance. When poorly managed, conflict may lead to strikes, institutional instability, and reputational damage. Conversely, effective management can transform disputes into opportunities for improvement.

Industrial conflict may be internal, such as grievances over salaries, working conditions, or governance, or external, involving government intervention. In Nigerian public universities, recurring conflicts are largely linked to inadequate funding, delayed remuneration, non-implementation of agreements, ineffective communication, and limited transparency. These structural challenges often result in prolonged strikes, disrupted academic calendars, low staff morale, and declining public confidence.

Conflict management involves structured processes aimed at promoting cooperation and constructive resolution rather than suppression. Effective strategies emphasize participation, coordination, open



communication, and mutual understanding. Leadership plays a critical role in harnessing the constructive potential of conflict while minimizing its disruptive effects. Given the persistent nature of disputes in Nigerian universities, there is a pressing need for more proactive and sustainable approaches to strengthen labour–administration relations and ensure institutional stability.

Factors Responsible for Conflict between Staff Union and Administration in Public Universities

Conflicts between staff unions and administrations vary by context, with major causes including inadequate funding. This occurs when resources fail to cover expenses efficiently. Nigeria's university system has transformed with more institutions and enrollment, relying primarily on government subsidies. However, these are insufficient for growing needs. Internally generated revenue (fees, grants) is secondary but often under-reported. Donations and endowments form a third source. UNESCO (1998) recommends 26% of national budgets for education, but Nigeria consistently fails this benchmark.

Deplorable working conditions also fuel conflicts, encompassing needs for better environments, fair treatment, safety, health measures, paid vacations, retirement benefits, medical access, and reasonable work hours (Aiyelari, 2019). Poor conditions, heavy workloads, inadequate facilities, staff disparities, and hostile environments contribute to disputes (Nwajioha et al., 2021).

Delays in salaries, arrears, and allowances exacerbate internal conflicts. Irregular government subsidies, rising wage bills, and administrative corruption worsen this. Unions and administrations at institutions like the University of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ekiti State University, and Lagos State University clashed over non-payment of full salaries and arrears.

Failure to implement government circulars, agreements, or promises is another trigger. Conflicts arise from lack of consensus on implementation (Shimawua, 2020). Agreements are signed but abandoned (Bakare, 2021). For example, the 2009 federal government-ASUU agreement for university rejuvenation remains largely unfulfilled, prompting multiple strikes.

Lack of effective communication is significant. Insufficient information flow, rumours, and alarms cause disputes (John-Eke & Akintokunbo, 2020). Communication transmits information for understanding (Ramadhini & Manafe, 2022). Effective exchanges use language, symbols, and gestures to resolve conflicts through mutual comprehension (Chukwuemeka et al., 2022). Failures lead to dissatisfaction, uncertainty, misinformation, and organizational conflicts.

Appointment of key officers, especially vice chancellors, sparks conflicts. Undemocratic leadership styles, treating institutions like chiefdoms without consultation, strain relations (Muoghalu, 2018). In 2016, University of Ibadan's non-academic unions opposed a vice chancellor's imposition, leading to prolonged conflict until resolution was reached (UI Bulletin, No. 4305, 2020).

Conflict Management Strategies Currently Adopted in Managing Staff Union-Administration

Strategies in Nigerian public universities are mainly reactive, traditional, and negotiation-based, often ineffective in preventing disruptions. They involve university managements with governments, yielding temporary ceasefires rather than sustainable resolutions. Avoidance and negligence are common, delaying or ignoring demands until escalation (Osakede, 2021). This provokes strikes, erodes trust (Owoyemi & Adeyemi, 2023). Avoidance escalates tensions, damages credibility, and burdens students (Owoyemi & Adeyemi, 2023; Osakede, 2021). Confrontation and coercion, using security or injunctions, achieve short-term compliance but deepen animosity, ignoring root causes like underfunding. Confrontation and coercion intensify during protests, with security deployments or



legal restraints (Adeyemi & Ademilua, 2012). Unions respond with strikes. These escalate hostility without resolving causes (Nwokike, 2025). Dialogue and negotiation, via ad-hoc committees, occur post-strike (Osakede, 2021). Examples include the 2025 tripartite talks (Izuchukwu, 2025). However, they are episodic, lacking follow-through.

Strategies are adversarial and short-term, with few proactive measures like resolution centres (Owoyemi & Adeyemi, 2023). Evidence shows avoidance, coercion, and inconsistent bargaining perpetuate cycles (Abada et al., 2023). The 2025–2026 FGN-ASUU agreement promises collaboration, but without implementation and preventive measures, conflicts persist (Nwokike, 2025). Effective management needs inclusive, long-term frameworks building trust. Current strategies involving collective bargaining, avoidance, confrontation/coercion, compromise/accommodation, and episodic dialogue, have weaknesses in explaining persistent Collective bargaining is characterized by ritualistic practices, often compromised by a lack of implementation. Governments enter into agreements, such as the 2009 FGN-ASUU and its renegotiation in 2025, concerning funding and autonomy; however, violations of these agreements diminish trust (Izuchukwu, 2025; Abada et al., 2023). This results in a repetitive cycle of unfulfilled promises. Collective bargaining serves to address issues related to salaries and working conditions (Nwokike, 2025). Supported by research (Owoyemi & Adeyemi, 2023), it plays a crucial role in agreements like the one established in 2009, which was renegotiated in 2025 for implementation in 2026. Nevertheless, delays and a lack of good faith lead to failures in the process (Abada et al., 2023).

Peace Education Strategies

Peace education is a multidisciplinary study that fosters non-violence and cooperation by cultivating knowledge, skills, and values to prevent conflict and promote harmony across intrapersonal, interpersonal, and global levels. It emphasises effective communication to address conflict roots, enabling individuals to achieve goals (Adams, 2022). Peace education is essential in equipping individuals with competencies that allow them to navigate and resolve conflicts non-violently. The field instills skills like active listening, empathy, and tolerance, particularly in youth, aligning with conflict resolution theory, which advocates dialogue and mediation to manage inevitable conflicts non-violently without (Zamalieva, 2020; Fasogba, Jarikrs, & Taiwo, 2024).

In Nigeria, peace education is implemented through formal curricula in schools, non-formal workshops, and informal community experiences (Kilag et al., 2024). Key strategies include dialogue, which promotes mutual understanding through open communication, and conflict resolution techniques like negotiation and mediation, reducing reliance on coercion (Ogboke, Adams, & Asala, 2024). Human rights and social justice education empower individuals to challenge systemic injustices, enhancing peace-building efforts.

Peace education's efficacy in institutional conflict management is evident globally. A study at Addis Ababa University demonstrated its ability to resolve disputes collaboratively (Wereta, 2019). Masri (2022) emphasized its role in fostering peace in crisis-affected regions, advocating curriculum integration. In Nigeria's diverse socio-cultural context, peace education promotes tolerance and cooperation, with interdisciplinary approaches enriching critical thinking and cross-cultural understanding (Biswas, 2024).

In Nigerian public universities, where union-administration conflicts disrupt operations, peace education offers a proactive framework to enhance relations and support institutional goals. To achieve this, both unions and administrators need professional development in conflict resolution skills through interactive programs such role-playing and problem-solving workshops; engage



students, while collaboration with community leaders. Workshops on emotional intelligence and dialogue strengthen conflict management (Biswas, 2024). However, challenges like limited funding, societal violence, and negative attitudes hinder implementation. Increased government investment, curriculum reform, and community sensitization are essential to overcome these barriers. Unlike reactive conflict management, peace education strategies proactively address systemic issues, fostering industrial harmony. Equipping stakeholders with non-violent tools mitigates union-administration conflicts, for sustainable university development and nation-building in Nigeria.

Peace education strategies include interventions and efforts aimed at bringing opposing parties together to resolve their differences and enhance positive relationships. Peace education strategies offer a transformative, proactive alternative to the predominantly reactive and ineffective conflict management approaches currently used in Nigerian public universities, such as avoidance, coercion, confrontation, and inconsistent collective bargaining. These traditional methods, while sometimes yielding short-term truces, fail to address underlying structural grievances by eroding trust, and perpetuating cycles of industrial disharmony (Owoyemi & Adeyemi, 2023). By equipping stakeholders such as the university administrators, union leaders, academic staff, and non-academic staff with conflict transformation skills, peace education can enhance industrial harmony and institutional stability.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the conflict transformation theory developed by John Paul Lederach as its theoretical framework. The theory emerged in response to conventional conflict resolution, which seeks to end disputes, and conflict management. Lederach conceptualizes conflict not merely as a problem to be solved but as an opportunity for growth, deeply embedded in relationships, social structures, and historical contexts. The theory emphasises the transformation of attitudes, institutions, and cultural norms as a basis for sustainable social change (Lederach; Louis Kriesberg, 2008).

Conflict transformation is viewed as a shift from destructive confrontation to constructive engagement, potentially leading to reconciliation or to the continued management of conflict through non-violent means. It entails changes in behaviour and structures—such as moving from coercion to cooperation—as well as changes in attitudes, including greater mutual respect. In organizations such as trade unions and universities, the theory addresses leadership dynamics, protracted disputes, intergenerational patterns, and depersonalization processes that inhibit de-escalation. Unlike conflict resolution, which may result in superficial settlements, transformation engages the root causes of conflict at personal, relational, structural, and cultural levels, promoting dialogue, empowerment, and non-violence (David Bloomfield, 1997).

This framework underpins the relevance of peace education in addressing conflicts between unions and university administrations in South-West Nigeria. Peace education fosters conflict management skills, tolerance, and non-violent communication, while encouraging a shift from adversarial to collaborative approaches. Within universities, it helps transform hostile relationships into peaceful coexistence and strengthens institutional capacity for sustainable dispute management.

Despite its strengths, the theory has attracted criticism. It is often regarded as overly idealistic in deeply divided societies, less suited to urgent crises, difficult to evaluate due to its long-term focus, and potentially dependent on external support, which may complicate implementation.



3.0. METHODOLOGY

Data for this study were qualitatively obtained from purposive selected staff unions, individuals, and public universities in South-West Nigeria. The universities studied were the University of Ibadan (Ibadan, Oyo State), Obafemi Awolowo University (Ile-Ife, Osun State), Lagos State University (Ojo, Lagos State), and Olabisi Onabanjo University (Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State). These institutions have a long history of industrial conflict and host all major staff unions—ASUU, SSANU, NASU, and NAAT—which have experienced prolonged periods of industrial action. The universities are first-generation federal and state institutions with staff drawn from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The study employed Key Informant Interviews (KII) and In-Depth Interviews (IDI) as data collection tools. Data generated from fieldwork were analysed qualitatively in line with the study objectives, using detailed field notes. Selected interview excerpts were reported verbatim to substantiate specific findings.

Data analysis was conducted through content analysis using a thematic framework. Interview transcripts were reviewed repeatedly and organized into themes relating to the origins and consequences of conflict, existing management strategies, and proposed peace education initiatives. To enhance credibility and validity, triangulation of interview and observational data were undertaken.

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were informed of the academic purpose of the study. Participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured through the use of pseudonyms and secure data storage, and all interviews were conducted in private.

4.0. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and discussion of the major research findings. The section was guided by research questions as follows:

Research Question 1: What are the major causes of conflicts between staff unions and administrations in public universities in southwest Nigeria?

This study found that multiple factors drive union–administration conflict in Nigerian public universities. Most participants identified inadequate funding as the primary cause, arising from rising education costs without corresponding revenue growth. National education allocations have declined sharply; for example, in 2021 only 5.6 per cent of the ₦13.08 trillion budget (₦742.5 billion) was allocated to education. This funding gap contributed to the 2009 Federal Government–ASUU agreement. As an interviewee from the University of Ibadan stated:

In recent years, public universities have experienced severe funding cuts, undermining teaching, research, and community service despite growing student enrolment and academic programmes. Heavy reliance on federal grants has resulted in poorly equipped libraries and laboratories, delayed salaries, and insufficient internally generated revenue (KII, university administrator, University of Ibadan).

It was also discovered that in most cases, the allocated funds are not utilized prudently by certain vice chancellors in managing the university's operations. The union officials insisted that there has been



potential mismanagement and embezzlement of funds by some university officials. It is important to efficiently utilise government funds, subsidies, and internally generated revenue.

Most respondents observed that delays in the payment of salaries and allowances significantly intensified conflicts. During fieldwork, staff were owed several months of salary arrears, as well as examination, supervisory, promotion, overtime, and shift duty allowances. A participant from the University of Ibadan noted that conditions worsened between 2015 and 2017 under Vice-Chancellor Abel Idowu Olayinka, unlike his predecessor Isaac Adewale, who paid year-end bonuses. Supporting this, Arogundade, Bankole, and Oyeniyani (2020) link irregular remuneration to union–management conflict. Timely payment of salaries and allowances is therefore essential to prevent industrial action.

Moreover, majority of respondents indicated that administrations in both federal and state universities struggle to implement agreements reached between unions and the government on employment conditions, despite existing government circulars and directives. In fact, one of the key informants said that “in 2009, the government agreed to allocate 26% of funds to education, provide 50% assistance to institutions, and pay a 20% examination administration allowance”. However, the implementation was marred by discrimination. A new agreement was reached in December 2025, but its full implementation was stalled. The findings of this investigation seem to be consistent with Shimawua (2020) and Bakare (2021b) argument that many agreements negotiated by staff unions and government or university management to prevent strikes are not honoured within the specified timelines and are eventually disregarded.

Furthermore, the majority of the participants agreed that poor communication skills contributed significantly to the emergence of internal conflicts between unions and university administrators in public universities. A respondent from Lagos State University states:

“The absence of transparent communication, constructive feedback, and dependence on rumours can significantly impair the harmonious relationship between trade unions and the administration” (IDI, Union Official, LASU).

The findings were consistent with Agbo's (2020) discovery that insufficient information flow and breakdowns in communication lead to grievances, unhappiness, uncertainty, misinformation, and conflict among employees, including those in universities. Based on the findings, it can be deduced that ineffective communication, which resulted from poor information flow, inadequate feedback, a lack of active listening, and rumours, among other factors, was responsible for most conflicts between unions and administration in public universities. Therefore, to achieve industrial peace and foster harmonious relationships, both staff unions and the administration should maintain regular communication.

Majority of participants revealed that the selection process of key administrative personnel, specifically the vice chancellor, was significantly influenced by undue political pressure exerted by the visitor (the president of the federal university and the governor of the state university). A respondent from Obafemi Awolowo University reaffirmed the above statement:

“The non-academic staff unions alleged that both the university management and the council had disregarded the established rules and regulations in the appointment procedure, thereby compromising their integrity. Consequently, this disagreement escalated into a significant conflict between the unions and the management” (KII, University Administrator, OAU).



Research Question 2: What are the key conflict management strategies currently adopted in managing staff union-administration conflicts in public universities?

Results revealed that mediation was adopted; however, the participants expressed dissatisfaction about its effectiveness in resolving conflict. They highlighted the challenges faced in enforcing the agreements reached between unions and administration through the mediation process. Interviewees from Olabisi Onabanjo University affirm that:

“The primary issue is that one party's unwillingness to cooperate renders the entire process futile and resource-draining. This was precisely the scenario encountered when the union leaders abruptly left the meeting with the vice chancellor. Their lack of trust in the University Council officials present stemmed from their allegations that certain members were complicit in perpetuating oppression within the system” (IDI, Union Official, Olabisi Onabanjo University, OOU).

These findings contradict a previous study conducted by Ihuaruluam (2015), which highlighted the effectiveness of mediation in managing industrial conflicts in universities. Despite the challenges of mediation, Gayo (2023) highlights benefits for the disputing parties, reducing barriers and communication issues between them, exploring solutions to challenges, identifying the needs of the parties, and developing durable conflict resolution methods.

The research revealed that avoidance was another commonly used approach in handling conflicts between unions and university administration. One of the participants from the administration of the University of Ibadan elucidated:

It is frequently used as a strategy to postpone actions, particularly when the requested outcome from the labour union is either unavailable or not anticipated by the government. Occasionally, the management's inability to fulfil the demand at a specific moment may lead to misunderstandings among the unions, even if they are willing to comply (KII, University Administrator, UI).

These findings were consistent with previous research conducted by scholars such as Mwanike and Muathe (2021), who discovered that avoidance as a conflict management strategy significantly impacts the performance of employees within public universities in Kenya. Based on the aforementioned evidence, it is evident that the avoidance strategy failed to effectively resolve conflicts or enhance the harmonious relationship between the unions and the administration.

Majority of participants were of the belief that adjudication was resorted to when alternative methods failed to produce favourable results, leading the disputing parties to pursue legal remedies in court. This particular conflict management style entails a 'win-lose' outcome, as the court's decision holds binding authority over all parties involved. One of the university administrators expressed his perspective on this matter.

The conflict between unions and the administration regarding illegal recruitment and promotion could not be resolved solely through avoidance and confrontation. It was only when the matter was taken to court that any progress was made. However, even after the legal proceedings, the issue still required mediation and negotiation (IDI, University Administrator, OAU).



Another conflict management strategy identified by the majority of the participants was coercion. It includes issuing threats, resorting to physical force, presenting ultimatums, or engaging in other forms of intimidation. An administrative representative affirmed that staff unions extensively employed coercion to compel the administration to meet their demands.

“It is evident that without implementing security measures, certain unruly troublemakers may exploit the situation and mistreat some of the administration staff. Consequently, we extend an invitation to the police, albeit off-campus, to uphold lawfulness and preserve order” (IDI, University Administrator, LASU).

This perspective was in support of Akparep (2022), who emphasized that the use of forceful strategies does not lead to a sustainable and satisfactory resolution for the conflicting parties. A significant majority of the participants argued that coercion or forceful measures were not the most effective approach, as they damage relationships. The majority of the participants firmly believed that confrontation, to a significant degree, is an effective approach for handling conflicts between staff unions and administrative bodies within public universities. A substantial majority of the participants acknowledged this fact:

“... it serves as an open invitation for the opposing party to share their perspectives and viewpoints on the matter. The union leaders usually adopt these tactics against the administration, especially when they want to achieve their objectives based on workers’ demands. But at the end of the day, dialogue still prevails (KII”, Union Official, OAU).

Findings from the sampled public universities indicate that confrontation occurs when individuals with opposing views debate to persuade others of the insignificance of the issue. These findings align with Adeyemi and Ademilua (2018), who identified grievance procedures, negotiation, collective bargaining, and confrontation as effective conflict management strategies in Nigerian universities. However, the data contradict Ihuarulam’s (2015) claim that confrontation alone is an effective conflict management technique in universities.

The majority of participants believed that strikes were typically initiated after reaching an impasse in negotiations as a means to voice discontentment regarding their working conditions. They emphasised that strike actions were intended to pressure management into engaging in negotiations or acknowledging their demands. A union leader representative expressed the following sentiment:

A strike is an inherent element of our strategic approach as it enables us to identify shortcomings, and upon its conclusion, it relationship between us. In instances where negotiations prove unsuccessful, we employ the strike as a feasible tactic to address conflicts between our union and the university administration. It helps us to force the administration to listen to us. If not for the strike, our working conditions would have worsened (IDI, Union Official, UI).

This finding is supported by Ajayi's (2014) research, which revealed that strikes, as a means of resolving conflicts, have compelled staff unions, particularly ASUU, to engage in negotiations with the administration or government to improve working conditions.

Research Question 3: Which peace education strategies can enhance industrial harmony and institutional stability in public universities?



Conflict Resolution Training

A majority of the study participants concurred that the absence of dialogue was the primary cause of unsuccessful negotiations regarding the welfare and service conditions of workers, thus leading to internal conflicts between unions and administration in public universities. The results of this study undoubtedly underscore the significance of dialogue as a vital peace education strategy for managing conflicts and improving relationships. Notably, a participant attested to this point.

“There is a need to engage in dialogue workshops and facilitated mediation training. ... Dialogue plays a crucial role in resolving conflicts and fostering trust, comprehension, and a cooperative relationship during negotiations and collective bargaining among conflicting parties” (KII, Union Official, OAU).

Another interviewee noted that:

“Conflict resolution training empowers both union officials and university administrators with the necessary competencies to handle conflicts, enabling them to seamlessly incorporate conflict resolution techniques into their everyday lives, both within and beyond the university environment” (KII, University Administrator, LASU).

Findings by Ukata and Silas-Dikibo (2020), Pelesiah (2022) and Omeje (2023) support that both union leaders and university officials should engage in seminars, workshops, and conferences that specifically address conflict management. They believed that effective adoption of dialogue in conflict resolution has a significant impact in promoting industrial harmony within universities.

Non-violent Communication

The findings from the study further revealed that non-violent communication is fundamental in fostering positive relationships among individuals and groups in the workplace. By embedding non-violent communication trainings in staff development and union orientation, universities can shift from adversarial posturing to collaborative problem-solving. It enhances and strengthens social cohesion when integrated into institutional practices. A participant revealed that:

Both parties must establish a channel that facilitates the flow of communication and enables unions to bring attention to pertinent issues through the use of memoranda and letters. This proactive approach ensures that concerns are addressed before resorting to industrial action (KII, University Administrator, OOU).

Several other scholars and researchers agree that peace education enhances behavioural transformation and reduces aggression (Awotunde & Onu, 2025). It is considered effective when there is mutual understanding by both the sender and the recipient, indicating that they comprehend the subject matter being communicated (Ramadhini & Manafe, 2022). However, failure to interact properly within the university system can result in misunderstandings between union leaders and university officials.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to identify, comprehend, and control one's own emotions, along with the emotions of others (Babatunde, Haruna & Adeshina, 2023). Results indicate that most participants perceive emotional intelligence as an important peaceful strategy to manage conflict and



improve relationships because of its ability to adapt to diverse social situations by utilizing emotional information to influence thoughts and behaviours. One interviewee reported thus:

“It ensures that leaders demonstrate greater proficiency in navigating intricate interpersonal dynamics, cultivating robust relationships, and effectively resolving conflicts. It enhances communication, diminishes tensions, and fosters collaborative problem-solving” (KII, University Administrator. UI).

The findings concur with Gaur (2023) that individuals with high emotional intelligence possess the ability to express their opinions and emotions respectfully and non-confrontationally. Likewise, they demonstrate the ability to listen to others and value their points of view and opinions.

Collaborative Problem Solving

Findings from a key informant reveals that promoting collaboration between unions and administration through open-door policies and the establishment of diverse committees for dialogue can effectively mitigate conflicts and foster harmonious relationships. The importance of this peace education approach was underscored by a union leader:

Collaboration and cooperation in decision-making can be observed in certain situations, and their occurrence is contingent upon the leadership style of the Vice Chancellor. ... Undoubtedly, enhancing collaboration between the administration and unions can contribute to conflict reduction and the cultivation of harmonious relationships (IDI, Union Official, OOU).

Data revealed that by organizing workshops, seminars, or conferences for conflict management, both the union and administration should actively participate in the implementation, evaluation, and outcomes of labour matters. Therefore, adopting a participatory decision-making approach is crucial for enhancing the relationship between unions and administration in public universities.

Mutual Respect

The findings of the research revealed that mutual respect necessitates courtesy, respect, politeness, and consideration for both unions and administration. It also entails that the rights and interests of disputing parties should be respected when resolving conflicts.

“Mutual respect reduces conflicts by valuing each party's rights and interests. Our union's integrity must be upheld, or we will withdraw from the agreement. Intimidation and harassment will not be tolerated” (IDI, University Administrator, OAU).

The findings agree with existing literature, which emphasises the significance of upholding the rights and dignity of workers in resolving conflicts and fostering harmonious employment relationships within universities (Abiwu, 2016). The study suggested that the union, administration, and government ought to demonstrate respect for each other's interests to prevent strike actions.

University-based Conflict Resolution Centre

The findings of the study supported the need to establish a university-based conflict resolution centre. These centres could offer mediation services, early warning systems for emerging grievances, and continuous peace education resources. The findings are supported by Akoma and Ibeh (2026), who posited the establishment of conflict management units with specialised units comprising representatives from unions and administration in public universities. These centres could also run awareness campaigns, peer mediation training, and monitoring of agreement implementation to ensure accountability.



5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

The study reveals that conflicts between staff unions and administrations in South-West Nigeria public universities arise mainly from inadequate funding, with education budgets below 6–8 per cent of national expenditure, far short of UNESCO recommendations. Other causes include resource mismanagement, delayed or irregular payment of salaries and allowances, non-implementation of agreements such as the FG–ASUU Agreement, poor communication, and politically influenced appointments. Existing conflict management strategies—mediation, avoidance, adjudication, coercion, confrontation, and strikes—are often ineffective or harmful. Peace education approaches, including dialogue, non-violent communication, emotional intelligence, collaborative problem-solving, and dedicated conflict resolution centres, offer more sustainable pathways to industrial harmony and institutional stability.

5.2. Recommendations

Universities should implement comprehensive conflict resolution training by mandating regular workshops and seminars for union leaders and administrators. These programmes should focus on negotiation, mediation, and constructive dialogue, equipping stakeholders with practical skills to address grievances peacefully. This approach reduces reliance on strikes and supports the goal of fostering harmonious labour relations.

Non-violent communication practices should be integrated into staff development and union activities. Training should emphasize clear communication channels, active listening, constructive feedback, and rumour prevention. By encouraging empathetic rather than adversarial engagement, this strategy minimizes misunderstandings, builds trust, and promotes industrial peace within public universities.

Institutions should also develop emotional intelligence programmes targeted at union and administrative leaders. Such training would enhance their ability to recognise, manage, and respond appropriately to emotions during disputes. Improved emotional awareness supports respectful interactions, collaborative problem-solving, and long-term mutual understanding between unions and management.

Collaborative problem-solving mechanisms should be strengthened through the establishment of joint committees, open-door policies, and participatory decision-making forums involving both unions and university administrations. These inclusive platforms encourage shared responsibility for labour issues, reduce confrontations, and transform adversarial relationships into cooperative partnerships.

Finally, universities should establish dedicated, university-based conflict resolution centres. These centres would provide mediation services, early grievance identification, continuous peace education, and monitoring of agreements, with representation from both unions and management. Institutionalizing proactive conflict management will enhance accountability, prevent recurring disputes, and promote sustainable industrial harmony.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that no conflict of Interest exist in this manuscript.

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