

## **MITIGATING STAKEHOLDER CONFLICTS IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: THE IGNATIUS AJURU UNIVERSITY AND CAPTAIN ELECHI AMADI POLYTECHNIC EXAMPLES**

**Daniel Nwanmereni**

Department of Mass Communication  
Wellspring University, Benin City, Nigeria  
Email: daniel\_nwanmereni@yahoo.com  
Phone: +234 - 803 065 6486

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**ABSTRACT:** *Several crises in tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been traced to poor policy communication, stakeholders' rejection of decisions or the management of conflicts. However, while some tertiary institutions in the country often encounter internal crises, the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic have remained relatively calm. This study investigated the communication flow patterns and decision-making approaches of these institutions, especially since conflicts and crises in many campuses in Nigeria have been linked to poor policy communication or disagreements arising from decisions. Among other objectives, the study investigated the structures that encourage participatory decision-making in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic. The study was anchored on the Stakeholder theory. The descriptive survey research design was used to study a population of 21,089 from which a sample size of 375 was drawn. Findings of the study showed that the authorities of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic involve staff and students of the institutions in decision-making through designated participatory structures. It was also found out that participatory decision-making mitigated stakeholder conflicts in the institutions. The study recommended, among other things, that the authorities of tertiary institutions in Nigeria should create and sustain structures that enhance wider stakeholders' participation in decision-making in order to mitigate the occurrence and escalation of stakeholder conflicts.*

**KEYWORDS:** participatory decision-making, patterns of stakeholder communication, stakeholder conflicts, stakeholders' participation, tertiary institutions, Nigeria

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Stakeholder-Management conflicts are gradually assuming regular features of the higher academic communities in Nigeria, especially public tertiary institutions. Several tertiary institutions in Nigeria encounter not only academic disruptions but also violent protests almost every academic session. This is in addition to academic or non-academic staff unions' rifts with the authorities of their institutions, which often halt academic activities across campuses in Nigeria. This was the situation at the Rivers State Polytechnic, now Ken Saro-Wiwa Polytechnic on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2014. Trouble started during the election of the leadership of National Association of Akwa Ibom

Students. Following a disagreement between the electoral panel and the candidates in the election, the authorities of the institution through the Chief Security Officer (CSO) waded into the situation. The CSO who came with men of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) allegedly arrested and took one of the candidates to the executive position of the Union away. The next morning, rumours came that the arrested student had died in police custody due to absence of medical attention. At this point, students of the institution mobilised and took to the streets of the institution. The rampaging students allegedly razed key facilities and attacked the CSO.

The situation of stakeholder conflicts is not different at the Rivers State University (formally, Rivers State University of Science and Technology) which has witnessed prolonged closures owing to conflicts between the authorities of the institution and some of its stakeholders, particularly staff and students. At the University of Port Harcourt, the story is the same. The last students' protest that took place at the University of Port Harcourt on April 11, 2016 resulted not only in the destruction of critical learning infrastructure in the University but also to the death of a student. The protest was a fallout of the "no registration, no examination" policy by the authorities of the institution. The non-acceptance of this policy by students of the institution built into a cloud of conflict and burst into a major crisis on Monday, April 11, 2016. In June, 2013, the University of Uyo witnessed a crisis which escalated into a major crisis. The crisis not only resulted in the destruction of critical learning infrastructure but also the closure of the institution for several months (Alemoh and Udoh, 2016).

Stakeholder conflicts are not peculiar to the institutions cited above. Several tertiary institutions in Nigeria – University of Abuja, University of Lagos, University of Ibadan, University of Benin, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Benue State University and indeed a host of other tertiary institutions in Nigeria have encountered not only stakeholder conflicts but also violent protests, which sometimes result in avoidable deaths. However, while several tertiary institutions across the country have often been through the furnace of internal crises, the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic have been relatively calm. This condition provokes an investigation into the stakeholder and conflict management strategies of these institutions (Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic). The investigation is pertinent especially since these tertiary institutions operate in the same society and engage in the same business of teaching, research and community service.

### **Ignatius Ajuru University of Education**

The Ignatius Ajuru University of Education is one of the universities owned by the Government of Rivers State, Nigeria. The institution became a full-fledged university in 2009 through University Education Law No. 8 of Rivers State. Until 2009, the institution had operated with the name: *Rivers State College of Education*, which was established in 1971. The University operates three campuses. They are: Main campus, located at Rumuolumeni in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, St. John's campus, along Port Harcourt-Aba Expressway and the Technology campus at Ndele in Emohua Local Government Area of the State. Ignatius Ajuru University of Education has six faculties and twenty-seven academic programmes. It also has a School of Graduate Studies (Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, 2015).

**Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic**

Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, formally known as *Port Harcourt Polytechnic*, is one of the polytechnics belonging to the Government of Rivers State, Nigeria. The institution commenced academic activities in 1987 as a School of Basic Studies. The edict establishing the institution was signed by the administration of Police Commissioner Fidelis Oyakhilome in 1984. The institution was first affiliated to the University of Ibadan and later to Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. In 2016, the former Rivers State College of Arts and Science was renamed Port Harcourt Polytechnic and in 2017 Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic (Onoyume, 2016; Anosike, 2016). The Polytechnic is located at Rumuola in Port Harcourt metropolis. The institution has nine Schools and twenty academic programmes.

**Statement of the Problem**

Several crises in tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been traced to poor policy communication, stakeholders' rejection of decisions or the management of conflicts. Many times, these crises not only affect normal academic activities but also result in avoidable deaths and destruction of scarce learning infrastructure. Often, internal crises in tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been traced to disagreements with decisions or the management of conflicts by the authorities of tertiary institutions. In several instances, authorities of tertiary institutions that have encountered violent protests have responded with the invitation of security personnel, especially the anti-riot policemen. The suspension of stakeholders' union activities, suspension of stakeholders' union leaders, demotions, outright desolution of stakeholders' unions and outright termination of appointment have been used by the authorities of several tertiary institutions in Nigeria to quell stakeholder-management conflicts. These authority-obedience approaches have exacerbated conflicts across several tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

However, while some tertiary institutions in the country often encounter internal crises, others enjoy relative calm. For instance, while several tertiary institutions in the country have lately encountered students' violent protests, the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic have remained relatively calm. This condition raises the concern for the investigation into the communication flow patterns and decision-making approaches of these institutions, especially since conflicts and crises in many campuses in Nigeria have been linked to poor policy communication or disagreements arising from decisions by the authorities of such institutions. The questions are: what are the stakeholder engagement approaches that result in the perceived peaceful atmosphere in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic? In what ways do the authorities of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic involve stakeholders of the institutions in decision-making?

**Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the dominant patterns of communication flow in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic?
2. In what ways do authorities of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic involve stakeholders of the institutions in decision-making?

3. In what ways does stakeholders' participation in decision-making influence mutual understanding between Managements, staff and students of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic?

### **Operational Definition of Terms**

The definition of the following terms was based on their application within the context of this work:

**Communication Movements:** This involves the regular sequence for exchanging stakeholder information in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic. The patterns can be vertical or horizontal. Vertical communication can be downward vertical – involving the processes through which Management sends information to staff and students or upward vertical – providing staff and students the space to send information to Management. Horizontal communication is the communication pattern that provides colleagues, such as staff or students the space to interact to solve some problems.

**Corporate Organisations:** In this work, the term “corporate organisations” incorporates business-oriented and non-profit organisations, such as manufacturing or servicing firms and tertiary institutions. The term also incorporates governmental and non-governmental firms with specific internal and external stakeholders.

**Decisions:** Decisions refer to policies or resolutions that are made by the authorities of a tertiary institution to govern behaviour or the activities of the institution. In tertiary institutions, the Governing Council, Senate and Management make policies and decisions. Decisions made by these decision-making bodies govern the activities and behaviour of staff, students and other stakeholders within an institution. However, when making decisions that hold interests for any stakeholders, such stakeholders are allowed participation in the process. This participation can occur through stakeholders' representatives or through larger convocations, depending on the stakeholders that are involved and the nature of the decision, among other conditions. In many tertiary institutions, decisions about fee increment, periodisation of registrations, accommodation, insurance policies and remunerations are made with relevant stakeholders in participation. Stakeholders' participation at this level of decision-making forms the conceptualisation of stakeholders' participation in decision-making by this work.

**Stakeholders:** Stakeholders, in the context of this study, involve Management, staff and students of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic. The terms – stakeholders and publics were used interchangeably in this work.

**Stakeholders' Participation in Decision-making:** This is concerned with the engagement of the staff and students of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic in decision-making. The engagement is to the extent of providing these stakeholders the space not only to make contributions but also to disagree with any plan that does not serve their interest.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The study was anchored on the Stakeholder theory. Some concepts were also reviewed to highlight the focus of the study.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Stakeholder Theory**

The stakeholder theory was propounded by Edward Freeman in his book “*Strategic Management: A stakeholder approach*” in 1984 (Heath, 2005). The theory emphasises the establishment of mutual understanding between corporate organisations and their stakeholders through participatory decision-making and other organisational processes. This is based on the argument of Freeman (1984) that corporate organisations ought to maintain links with different stakeholders in order to sustain mutual understanding and reduce stakeholder conflicts. The theory contends that organisational objectives must be pursued with the interests of different stakeholders in view (Heath, 2005).

The importance of the stakeholder approach is based on the fact that the implementation of job objectives or decisions by an organisation often goes with implications for certain individuals or groups such as students, employees, host communities, customers, etc. In order to ensure the cooperation of these groups during decision or project implementation, it is instructive to involve them in decision-making or project planning (Tench and Yeomans, 2009; Seitel, 2011; Bruning and Ledingham, 2011). The condition that necessitates this interface in decision-making is due to the fact that the organisation depends on these groups in the realisation of goals. If a tertiary institution, for instance, depends on certain stakeholders to remain relevant, it becomes imperative to involve such groups in the articulation of goals that concern them. Heath (2005) argues that “organisations that develop strong instrumental links including communication channels with stakeholders are likely to hold a competitive advantage over organisations that do not” (p. 809). The thesis of the stakeholder theory is that relationship between corporate organisations and their different stakeholders is an ongoing process of accommodation and that this accommodation can only be strengthened or sustained through genuine engagement.

### **Defining Organisational Conflicts**

An organisational conflict is a disagreement or controversy between an organisation and any of its publics. This condition results when there exists an incompatibility or a contradiction between the interest of the organisation and any of these publics. Griffin and Moorhead (2007) define organisational conflict as the resultant situation when the interest of an organisation and that of any of its publics differ. This condition brings a feeling of discomfort or disharmony between the parties. The implication of the occurrence of a conflict between a corporate organisation and any or some of its stakeholders is that conflict is a product of interaction. It also means that conflict is inevitable among interdependent groups.

Although conflicts are inevitable due to the interdependent nature of corporate organisations and their publics, conflicts, however, do not occur in isolation. They are caused by certain conditions or factors. The conditions that precipitate conflicts in corporate organisations, including tertiary institutions, can be communicational, behavioural and structural (Singh, 2008).

According to Singh (2008), many organisational conflicts are caused by poor, inadequate or the absence of communication. Poor communication means the inability to send a clear message; inadequate communication implies the absence of full or sufficient information about a particular activity or issue; and absence of communication represents the total absence of information about an issue (Heath 2005; Reddi, 2009; Sachdeva, 2009). Poor communication can also mean the absence of communication or information, such as the situation where organisational stakeholders are not aware of an undertaking by the organisation. It can also be a situation where stakeholders do not know what management is doing about a particular issue. This situation can trigger avoidable conflicts (Singh, 2008). This is because absence of communication precipitates rumours, gossips, or panic among concerned stakeholders. One of the ways corporate organisations can avoid conflicts that arise from poor communication is to incorporate multi-media of communication where messages can be delivered through different channels to ensure that stakeholders are sufficiently informed (Reece and Brandt, 1996). Management can also encourage downward and upward communication within the organisation.

Behavioural conflicts, according to Reece and Brandt (1996), are conflicts that are caused by non-compliant behaviour of difficult people or groups. For internal stakeholders, difficulty can be manifested by both management and employees. When management is seen as being authoritarian, for instance, an atmosphere of suspicion or distrust could prevail. This condition will certainly make cooperation and teamwork difficult (Reece and Brandt, 1996). It is also known that some external stakeholder groups could be difficult to relate with (Sachdeva, 2009). This difficulty can result in frequent conflicts between such stakeholders and the organisation. Behavioural conflicts also occur due to cultural differences (Singh, 2008). The condition is that personal biases, sex, race, religion, cultural orientations, etc can be sources of conflicts. The task for the organisation in the bid to avoid behavioural conflicts is to effectively communicate its culture and to emphasise specialisation and interdependence. That is, to entrench the consciousness that the realisation of one's goals depends on interdependence and the cooperation of everyone. It is to emphasise collectivism above individualism (Singh, 2008).

According to Singh (2008), structural conflicts arise due to non-participation of stakeholders in decision-making. This is because participation provides the space for mutual understanding. Mutual understanding results in cooperation, since participation leaves the consciousness of being in control of the situation in the participant. White (1994) shares this view as she categorises genuine participation into cooperation (which involves partnership and delegation of power) and citizen control (which involves empowerment of people). Singh (2008) argues that if stakeholders are not allowed to participate in decision-making, they could become resentful to such decisions that were made in their absence. The point is that structural organisational conflicts can be avoided through participatory organisational processes (Itzhaky and York, 2000; Laverack, 2001; Miller and Campbell, 2006; Salmon, 2007; Roche, 2008; Gutberlet, 2009).

**Decision-Making Approaches**

Decision-making is one of the crucial actions that govern activities in corporate organisations, including tertiary institutions. It is foundational to efficiency, harmony and sustainable growth (Heath, 2005). Several decision-making approaches have been identified in the literature; including leadership/management decision-making, small group decision-making and participative decision-making approaches (Gamble and Gamble, 2002; Miller 2006; Griffin and Moorhead, 2007).

**Leadership/Management Decision-making Approach:** The leadership/management decision-making approach is otherwise referred to as the rational decision-making process (Griffin and Moorhead, 2007). It is the decision-making process in which decisions are made by the Chief Executive or in conjunction with top ranking officers of the management cadre, such as managers or the board of directors. Whatever decision that is made by these top ranking officers is binding on all organisational members because it is believed that these individuals have enough information to make objective decisions (Miller, 2006).

Gamble and Gamble (2002) observe that executive decision-making approach is often problematic. This is because whatever decisions taken by top organisational hierarchy will usually be implemented by other members of the organisation. "If members disagree with a decision or do not understand it, they may not work very hard to make it succeed" (p. 329). The point is that, since implementation is crucial to the realisation of the goals of a decision, it is imperative that concerned stakeholders that will be affected in actual implementation should participate in the process through which the decision evolved (Miller, 2006).

**Small Group Decision-making Approach:** The small group decision-making approach is otherwise referred to as the representative decision-making approach. Small group decision-making process has been described as alternative to the rational/executive decision-making approach (Gamble and Gamble, 2002). It involves decision-making by representatives of different groups. Small group decision-making for a university, for instance, may include the Governing Council, Senate, Management top hierarchy, Deans of Faculties, Heads of Departments, leaders of academic and non-academic staff unions and the leadership of Students Unions. A quick look at the representatives of the university small group decision-making example will simply justify the groups' representation, but this is not until these representatives are nominated and approved by their constituents. This is because of the assumption that small group decision-making process is characterised by bounded rationality - the belief that finding dependable solutions to a problem is beyond the abilities of most decision-makers (Griffin and Moorhead, 2007). What this means is that small group decision-making approach has its merits and demerits.

**Participative Decision-making Approach:** The last decision-making approach identified in this study is the participative decision-making process. This decision-making approach has been described as the practical approach to decision-making (Griffin and Moorhead, 2007). The peculiarity of participative decision-making approach is that it makes a distinction between decision-making and decision-taking. In other words, participative decision-making considers the earlier approaches (leadership/management and small group decision-making approaches) as decision-taking exercises. Ratnam (2006) states that decision-taking is an autonomous exercise.

The autonomy is based on the condition that if those to participate in a decision-making process are already known, whatever they do is simply decision-taking. Thus, Ratnam (2006) argues that decision-making is a group process which is based on consultation and communication with all members of the groups that are concerned. What this means is that every individual and group that will be affected in the implementation of the decision deserves to be given the opportunity to participate in the process. Griffin and Moorhead (2007) state that participative decision-making involves a methodical process of gathering and evaluating views before a decision is taken on a matter.

### **Tertiary Institutions**

According to the Federal Ministry of Education (2000), tertiary institutions (also known as higher education) in Nigeria are educational institutions in the country that offer programmes leading to the award of higher certificates and degrees. The institutions include universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and monotechnics. From the global perspective, tertiary institutions play a very vital role to the wider society. The role is to drive economic and social developments. Aleke, Malife, Ohochukwu, Potopregha, Lahben, Monday and Anyamele (2014) state that the primary mission of tertiary education is the creation and dissemination of knowledge. According to World Bank (1991), economic and social developments are driven by the application and advancements of knowledge. Education in general and higher education in particular is considered fundamental to the construction of a knowledge-driven economy.

The task of constructing a formidable intellectual resource base by Nigerian tertiary institutions is trailed by long-standing problems, such as funding, efficiency and governance (Saint, Hartnett and Strassner, 2004; Aluede, Aluede and Ufah, 2004). The continual presence of these problems have been the foundation of frequent conflicts between unions (academic and non-academic) in Nigerian tertiary institutions and the government. The problems confronting tertiary institutions in Nigeria, especially governance has also been the source of frequent rifts between authorities and major stakeholders (staff and students) of tertiary institutions in the country. For instance, in May 2001, the authorities of University of Ilorin terminated the appointment of forty-nine lecturers for participating in an ASUU strike. The Unilorin saga lingered until the Supreme Court on June 12, 2009 voided the action of the authorities of the institution and reinstated the sacked lecturers (Ige, 2009; Benjamin, 2009). The situation was not different at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka when the Governing Council of the institution suspended a former Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Greg Nwakoby on the allegation that he maligned Council members. The suspension was set aside by the National Industrial Court on December 8, 2015 (Onyekwere, 2015).

The current state of governance in many Nigerian tertiary institutions increasingly exemplifies the pursuit of political gains (power, status, etc) by the administrators rather than the promotion of matters of principle. It is no longer surprising when staff and students or the representatives of these stakeholders are labelled loyal or disloyal to particular administrations in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. While those considered loyal are allegedly rewarded with appointments and promotions, perceived foes of an administration are tactically made as much irrelevant as they would not be able to challenge the decisions or actions of the administration occupying the realms of power. This condition exemplifies the observation of Iyayi (2014) regarding the rising conflicts

and crises in Nigerian public universities. According to Iyayi (2014), in order to have their way, many university administrators weed off all academics, staff and students they feel pose threats to the realisation of their selfish ambitions. Lakemfa (2017) laments the situation of leadership-induced conflicts in many Nigerian universities which gradually assume a military garrison characterised by authority-obedience management approaches to decision-making and implementation.

The challenges confronting Nigerian tertiary institutions, especially as it affects governance, also affect the perception of the global community about the quality of training the country's educational system can offer. This is especially since tertiary institutions are global institutions whose performance determines the attraction of funds and support from both local and foreign support agencies. The rising conflicts and crises in Nigerian tertiary institutions also have grave implications on the effort to enhance or maintain global visibility as well as overseas students' subscription. Sado (2015) argues that there are no national standards for measuring the performance of tertiary institutions. What this means is that whatever happens to a country's tertiary institutions can affect the country not only in the consideration of the quality of products but also in terms of public reputation. The importance of public perception of a tertiary institution accounts for why entire stakeholder communication and stakeholders' participation in decision-making are crucial not only in ensuring an enduring positive public reputation but also in ensuring a peaceful atmosphere for a tertiary institution to carry out its mandate.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The nature of this study necessitated the use of descriptive survey design. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011), a descriptive survey describes or documents current conditions or attitudes. The population of the study was 21, 089. The figure comprises the population of Management, staff (academic and non-academic) and students (undergraduate and post-graduate) of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (10, 239) and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic (10, 850). Based on the population, a sample of 375 was drawn. The sample was based on the sampling system of Keyton (2001). The instrument used to obtain data for the study was the questionnaire.

To administer the instrument to the sample of the study, the multi-stage sampling procedure was used. The first stage involved the proportionate sampling technique which was used to allocate samples to the institutions that formed the scope of the study based on their percentage representation in the overall population. Thus, while the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education received a sample of 193 (51%), Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic received 182 (49%) samples. The next stage involved the stratification of the population of each institution into: academic staff, non-academic staff and students. The percentage representation of individual stratum determined the allocation of samples to different strata (academic staff, non-academic staff and students) of the institutions. The actual administration of copies of the questionnaire to each stratum involved the accidental sampling technique.

**DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

Data were presented in statistical tables using the weighted mean score based on a four-point Likert Scale.

**Decisions:** When the calculated value from the Likert scale is equal to or greater than the mean, the proposition was held in the affirmative. When the calculated value is less than the mean, the proposition was considered to be negative. The mean is 2.5. The formula for the calculation is:

$$AR \times W$$

$$R \times NO$$

Where:

AR = Aggregate Response

W = Weighting

R = Total number of Response

NO = Number of options in the scale (4)

Using the four points Likert Scale, responses to the items in the questionnaire were weighted as follows:

Strongly Agreed (SA) = 4

Agreed (A) = 3

Strongly Disagreed (SD) = 2

Disagreed (D) = 1

**Table 1: Dominant communication patterns used for stakeholder engagement in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic**

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Institutions	Responses				SA	Total	WMS	Remarks
			A 4	SD 3	D 2	1				
1.	Information about the activities of my institution flows from Management to staff and students through memos, circulars, etc.	Ignatius Ajuru University	96	71	11	15		634	3.2	Accepted
		Elechi Amadi Polytechnic	103	64	6	9		625	3.4	Accepted
2.	The Management of my institution passes information to staff and students through Staff Unions, SUG/ Faculty/ Departmental/ Centre Heads.	Ignatius Ajuru University	94	74	9	16		632	3.2	Accepted
		Elechi Amadi Polytechnic	98	75		9		626	3.4	Accepted
3.	The Management of my institution uses some online or social media platforms in communicating with staff and students.	Ignatius Ajuru University	73	89	12	19		592	3	Accepted
		Elechi Amadi Polytechnic	96	63	8	15		604	3.3	Accepted
4.	The Management of my institution responds to staff/students' requests, suggestions, etc forwarded through Staff Unions, Students' Affairs Department and online platforms.	Ignatius Ajuru University	72	98	11	12		626	3.2	Accepted
		Elechi Amadi Polytechnic	69	78	14	21		559	3	Accepted
5.	The Management of my institution allows interactions among staff and students.	Ignatius Ajuru University	128	53	5	7		688	3.5	Accepted
		Elechi Amadi Polytechnic	91	68		23		591	3.2	Accepted

Data presented in Table 1 indicate that stakeholder communication in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic embraced the vertically downward and vertically-upward flow patterns, thereby providing management, staff and students of the institutions the platforms for interactions. This is based on the positive weighted mean scores obtained by items 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the questionnaire.

**Table 2: Stakeholders' participation in decision-making in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic**

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Institutions	Responses				Total	WM S	Remarks
			SA 4	A 3	SD 2	D 1			
6.	The Management of my institution allows staff/students' participation especially when making decisions that hold interest for us.	Ignatius Ajuru University	84	77	14	18	613	3.1	Accepted
		Elechi Amadi Polytechnic	69	80	11	22	560	3	Accepted
7.	Staff/students' participation in decision-making is encouraged through regular Management-stakeholder dialogues.	Ignatius Ajuru University	83	92	8	10	632	3.2	Accepted
		Elechi Amadi Polytechnic	57	79	17	29	528	2.9	Accepted
8.	Management encourages staff/students' participation in decision-making through staff/students' participation in Commission of Enquiries.	Ignatius Ajuru University	31	16	63	83	381	1.9	Rejected
		Elechi Amadi Polytechnic	66	89	11	16	569	3.1	Accepted
9.	Management also encourages staff/students' participation in decision-making through staff/students' membership of special committees.	Ignatius Ajuru University	72	85	19	17	598	3	Accepted
		Elechi Amadi Polytechnic	86	68	10	18	586	3.2	Accepted
10.	Staff/students' participation in decision-making is also done through staff/students unions representation.	Ignatius Ajuru University	96	72		23	623	3.2	Accepted
		Elechi Amadi Polytechnic	101	71	2	8	629	3.4	Accepted

On stakeholders' participation in decision-making in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, data presented in Table 2 indicate that the management of the institutions encouraged stakeholders' participation in decision-making processes. The Table also shows that some of the ways the authorities of the institutions encouraged stakeholders' participation in decision-making were regular interactions with stakeholders (staff and students), stakeholder-management dialogues and stakeholders' representation in special committees. This

report is based on the weighted mean scores of 3.2, 2.9, 3, 3.2, 3.2 and 3.4 respectively obtained by items 7, 9 and 10 of the questionnaire.

**Table of 3: Influence of participatory decision-making on mutual understanding between Management and staff/students of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic**

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Institutions	Responses				Total	WM S	Remarks
			SA 4	A 3	SD 2	D 1			
11.	There is mutual understanding and cordial relationship between Management and staff/students of your institution.	Ignatius Ajuru University	87	79	8	19	620	3.2	Accepted
		Elechi Amadi Polytechnic	92	70	6	14	604	3.3	Accepted
12.	The prevailing mutual understanding is considerably due to staff/students' participation in decision-making.	Ignatius Ajuru University	76	81	16	20	559	3.1	Accepted
		Elechi Amadi Polytechnic	68	69		45	524	2.8	Accepted
13.	Your institution hardly encounters staff/students-management conflicts due to the participative approach of management to decisions and issues.	Ignatius Ajuru University	93	69	6	25	616	3.1	Accepted
		Elechi Amadi Polytechnic	73	70	13	26	554	3	Accepted

On the influence of participatory decision-making on mutual understanding in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, the presentation in Table 3 shows that there is mutual understanding between management and staff and students of the institutions due to participatory decision-making. This report is evident from the weighted mean scores of 3.2, 3.3, 3.1, 2.8, 3.1, 3 respectively obtained by items 11, 12 and 13 of the questionnaire.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Data presented in the tables above provided the basis for this discussion. The discussion was done in the order the research questions that guided the study were presented.

### Research Question 1: What are the dominant patterns of communication flow in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic?

In carrying out any study that involves the assessment of the influence of participatory decision-making in a tertiary institution, a careful understanding of the communication environment of the institution is fundamental. This is essentially because decision-making cannot thrive without

communication. Hence, the first objective of the study was to ascertain the dominant patterns of communication used for stakeholder engagement in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic. Responses to the question indicated that stakeholder communication in the institutions embraced the vertical (involving both downward and upward flows) and horizontal flow patterns. This report is evident from the positive weighted mean scores obtained by items 1-5 of the questionnaire which examined the dominant patterns of communication used for stakeholder engagement in the institutions (Table 1). Other than the regular communication channels such as letters, memos and circulars, the Department of Students' Affairs, online platforms and stakeholder unions were exploited to enhance stakeholder communication in the institutions. Data presented in Table 1 also indicated that Managements of the institutions responded to enquiries by staff and students, thereby encouraging upward communication.

Across the institutions, responses to research question 1 indicated the understanding of the importance of leadership communication by Managements of the institutions. Designated communication channels such as memos and circulars and structures such as stakeholders' unions, Heads of Departments, Deans of Centres, Schools and Faculties as well as the Department of Students' Affairs were identified as sources of downward-vertical communication in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic (Tables 1).

The exploitation of the downward communication movement by Managements of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic is not surprising. This is due to the importance of downward communication in leading the activities of corporate organisations. According to Nkwocha (2016), downward communication is a function that enhances the activities of corporate organisations. The function of leading the activities of a corporate organisation is what makes downward communication strategic in corporate organisations. Sachdeva (2009) states that the success of corporate efforts demands that every organisation has to perform the management functions of planning, directing, leading and executing its programmes and activities through communication. Hasan (2013) argues that where downward communication is poor or absent, rumours and misinformation will fill the vacuum. Poor or absence of downward communication opens the door for rumours which could create avoidable tensions.

However, downward communication which represents instructions, notices, warnings, etc from the Management of an institution must elicit the acceptance of target stakeholders to obtain intended results. In other words, stakeholders in organisations, including tertiary institutions must agree with an instruction, decision or policy, else they may not work hard to implement it (Miller, 2006). This condition underscores the importance of the creation of structures that encourage upward communication in corporate organisations. This is because upward communication channels serve as feedback mechanisms which keep Management abreast of the position, views, opinions, etc of stakeholders regarding a corporate policy or decision.

Since stakeholders' relationship is an ongoing process of accommodation, as identified by Heath (2005) in his articulation of the stakeholder theory, Managements of tertiary institutions need to strengthen the links that ensure stakeholders' feedback on decisions or policies. Heath (2005)

identifies the importance of entire communication in stakeholder engagement as he argues that corporate organisations that develop strong instrumental links including communication channels with stakeholders are likely to hold a competitive advantage over corporate organisations that operate otherwise. The development of strong stakeholder links and communication networks by Managements of tertiary institutions will forestall frequent frictions and protests that arise from decisions or the introduction of new policies.

**Research Question 2: In what ways do authorities of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic involve stakeholders of the institutions in decision-making?**

To carefully investigate stakeholders' participation in decision-making in tertiary institutions, certain structures or avenues that enhance stakeholders' participation in corporate organisations were provided for respondents' identification. Participatory platforms such as meetings, Management-stakeholder dialogues, stakeholders' participation in commission of enquiries set up by Management, stakeholders' membership of special committees and stakeholders' representation were used to investigate stakeholders' participation in decision-making in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic. These structures were found to enhance participatory decision-making in the institutions. This report is evident from the weighted mean scores of 3.2, 2.9, 3.1, 3, 3.2, 3.2 and 3.4 respectively obtained by items 7-10 of the questionnaire (Table 2). Responses to research question indicated the exploitation of structures, such as regular meetings, Management-stakeholders' dialogues, stakeholders' participation in commission of enquiries and membership of special committees as some of the structures used by Managements of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic to promote participatory decision-making.

The involvement of the staff and students of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic by the Managements of the institutions is a clear indication that the restriction of the space for stakeholders' participation in decision-making is illogical. The danger is that the implementation of a decision made without the right pool of information, including dissensions, may be truncated by resistances from aggrieved stakeholders. In their investigation of students' crisis in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, Adeyemi, Ekundayo and Alonge (2010) found out that non-participation of students in decision-making is one of the leading causes of campus conflicts in Nigeria. The threat posed by non-participation of stakeholders in decision-making in tertiary institutions was also identified by Davies, Ekwere and Uyanga (2015) in their investigation of the factors influencing students' unrest in institutions of higher learning and implications on academic performance of students of University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

In the light of the understanding of the consequences of stakeholders' non-acceptance and resistance of the implementation of decisions or policies they perceive as being inimical to their interest, it is expedient that the authorities of other tertiary institutions in Nigeria emulate the exemplary stakeholder management approach adopted by the authorities of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic. Stakeholders' participation in decision-making in Nigerian tertiary institutions can be enhanced through stakeholders-management dialogues, stakeholders' participation in commission of enquiries and stakeholders'

participation in special committees. Holding regular stakeholder interactions can also enhance stakeholders' participation in decision-making in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

**Research Question 3: In what ways does stakeholders' participation in decision-making influence mutual understanding between Managements, staff and students of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic?**

Responses to research question 3 indicated that stakeholders' participation in decision-making in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic mitigated stakeholder conflicts in the institutions. This report is evident from the weighted mean scores of 3.2, 3.3, 3.1, 2.8, 3.1 and 3, respectively obtained by items 11, 12 and 13 of the questionnaire (Table 3). That the provision of the structures that encouraged participatory decision-making in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic mitigated stakeholder conflicts in the institutions is not surprising. This is because participation serves as the remedy to the consequences or shortcomings of top-down management approaches. Participation encourages dialogue, enhances local knowledge and endears mutual understanding among groups (Inagaki, 2007). This is the crux of the stakeholder theory which dwells on the creation and promotion of the space for stakeholders' participation in decision-making and development processes in order to continually elicit genuine cooperation (Claridge, 2004; Anyaegbunam, Mefalopulos and Moetsabi, 2004; Heath, 2005).

The importance of participatory decision-making in reducing or mitigating stakeholder conflicts in tertiary institutions supports the findings of Oni and Adetoro (2005) in their study of the effectiveness of student involvement in decision-making and university leadership. The study carried out by Muindi (2011) on the relationship between participation in decision-making and job satisfaction among academic staff in the school of Business, University of Nairobi also supports the importance of participation in mitigating stakeholder conflicts in tertiary institutions. According to Muindi (2011), the participation of academic staff of the School of Business, University of Nairobi in decision-making resulted in high level of job satisfaction and the reduction of conflicts between staff and Management of the School.

The creation and promotion of the platforms that encourage stakeholders' participation in decision-making in tertiary institutions in Nigeria will enable staff and students of the institutions to consider themselves to lead issues that concern them rather than to presume to be forced to accept decisions made by Management. This participatory approach will mitigate stakeholder conflicts in the institutions, as it is the case in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic.

## **CONCLUSION**

The creation of structures that encouraged participatory decision-making by the authorities of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic resulted in the mitigation of stakeholder conflicts in the institutions. This is at the time several tertiary institutions across Nigeria encountered violent conflicts and protests due to stakeholders' rejection of policies or decisions by the authorities of such institutions. Decisions can only elicit stakeholders' goodwill

when they arise from group negotiations and when all group members share decision implications. The continuous neglect of participatory approaches in decision-making will continually result in resistances to decision implementation and the escalation of stakeholder conflicts in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

1. The authorities of tertiary institutions in Nigeria should emulate the stakeholder management approach of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic by opening up structures that will enable two-way communication. The Department of Students' Affairs and staff unions, in addition to regular stakeholders' forums and dialogues, should be made more useful to enhance two-way information flow in the institutions.

2. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria can also exploit the social media and interpersonal approaches in strengthening two-way communication. The nature of the social media in providing constant interactions and updates will help in disseminating stakeholder information in the institutions. Interpersonal communication will also help to strengthen stakeholders' relationship in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

3. The authorities of tertiary institutions in Nigeria should create and sustain structures that enhance wider stakeholders' participation in decision-making. Structures, such as meetings, stakeholder-management dialogues, stakeholders' participation in commission of enquiries and membership of special committees, will not only enhance the space for wider stakeholders' participation in decision-making but will also open up the space for better communication and identification of issues. This approach will also endear community spirit in a common effort and enlarge stakeholders' capacity to take charge of their development effort. This will significantly mitigate stakeholder-management conflicts and protests which often arise due to the feeling of decision or policy imposition.

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